

Queen Sirikit of Thailand

Patroness of Thai Crafts in the Northeastern Region



Their Majesties the King and Queen during visit to Ban Kutsim SUPPORT Handicrafts Training Center, Khao Wong District, Kalasin Province. On this occasion the village elders performed a ceremony to offer their loyal best wishes to their Majesties.

Thossaphol NORATUS
thossaphol@ictforall.org

For the past over 64 years, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej has tirelessly dedicated His Majesty's energy and genius to numerous royal projects that have alleviated the level of poverty and promoted the welfare of rural inhabitants, Her Majesty Queen Sirikit has stayed close to His Majesty's side. The diversified royal activities that Her Majesty the Queen has untiringly and graciously undertaken not only support and strengthen the development work undertaken by His Majesty, but also raise standards of living of the poor and underprivileged and of the country as a whole.

Her Majesty's work has permeated through even the remotest areas and has consequently received both domestic and worldwide recognition, as certified by the many awards and citations received from various international institutions and organizations. Therefore, in the hearts of all Thai people, the royal couples symbolize unity and brilliance.

Upon the auspicious occasion of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit's 78th birthday anniversary, August 12, 2010. We wish to publish an article in honor of Her Majesty's work "*Patroness of Thai Crafts*". That is a compilation of her achievements and contributions to the Thai arts and crafts, and focuses on the activities within the SUPPORT Foundation, centers in the Northeastern region. Her Majesty has initiated the SUPPORT Foundation in the hope that it will educate rural people and equip them with necessary crafting skills and artistic know-how, enabling them to find sources of income and have a sufficient livelihood.

The project to create additional occupations and the project to revive folk arts have subsequently led to the establishment of the Foundation for the Promotion of Supplementary Occupations and Related Techniques of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit, or the SUPPORT Foundation, under Her Majesty the Queen on July 21, 1976 with the twin goals of supporting and promoting folk handicrafts in a systematic and continuing manner, as well as the preservation of national arts and handicrafts for later generations, as have existed in the ancient, classical mode and in modern innovations.

The Northeastern region of the Kingdom of Thailand or Isan makes up as much as one third of the country's total area. Many of the rivers are merely short streams and much of the land is composed of sandy, friable soils, which is why there is always a drought problem in the dry season. But the local handicrafts, which originated from the accumulation of experience and imagination of their ancestors, passed on to generations of descendants, constitute the important heritage that indicates the flourishing culture of Isan amidst the deterioration of natural conditions.

So long ago, Isan has been facing with the economic hardship and grinding poverty of the people. But with the express wish to help the people in the area by Their Majesties the King and Queen and Royal Family members, Her Majesty the Queen has initiated the SUPPORT centers and projects for promotion and support Isan crafts as additional occupations. For example;

The Ban Saithong SUPPORT project is based in Pathumwapi Sub-district, Songdao District, Sakon Nakhon Province. Established in 1981, it began when Her Majesty visited the village and saw villagers caught in the poverty trap. Her Majesty gave out of her personal funds to support the reforestation program and promote silk weaving among the housewives. In 1992, Her Majesty gave more assistance by giving 101 dairy cows to boost their income through supplementary occupations. Since the first silk weaving promotion, the project has been expanded to include more operations in the present. Members have engaged in such pursuits as embroidery, bamboo basketry, dairy cow farming, and beetle-wing decoration.

The Kutnakham SUPPORT center is located in Charoensin District, Sakon Nakhon Province. Its first membership group consisted of citizens from two villages, the total population of the two villages is 1,400 people, whose major occupations were vegetable growing and fruit orchards. Its chronic problems were twofold: infertile soils and flooding in the flood season and shortage of water in the dry season. His Majesty built a reservoir in 1984 for use as the village's own source of water. Still, the people remained poor as they relied solely on agriculture. Despite their

poverty, the people of Kutnakham maintain a strong sense of unity. They have participated in the “forest preserving water” or Pa-Rak-Nam project under the initiative of Her Majesty since 1983. Later, the Kutnakham SUPPORT center was established at Ban Kutnakham so that the poor could engage in supplementary occupations after the harvest. Once the ceramic factory began operation, the Ministry of Science and Technology sent specialists to give advice at sessions that attracted a large number of interested persons. The result has been the special brand of ceramics unique to Ban Kutnakham. Her Majesty subsequently promoted the ceramics at exhibitions abroad, which won recognition worldwide. Her Majesty added further variety to their SUPPORT endeavors by selecting talented individuals for more training at the Chitralada center in many different branches. At present, the Kutnakham SUPPORT center supports additional occupations, such as artificial flowers, silk weaving, carpet weaving, and water hyacinth basketry.



Her Majesty the Queen visiting members of the Supplementary Occupations and Related Techniques Project, and members of the Pa-Rak-Nam Reafforestation Programme set up through Her Majesty the Queen's initiative, in the vicinity of Kut Na Kham Village, Swang Daen Din District, Sakon Nakhon Province.

The Ban Chan SUPPORT project is based in Muang Sub-district, Ban Muang District, Sakon Nakhon Province. Much of Ban Chan is covered in forest. It also grows rice on lowlands and has watersheds. Most of the villagers are farmers but their rice yields are rather poor because of felling of the trees for logging and the invasion of communist guerillas in the past. The villagers, however, were strongly united among themselves, mainly because of their acknowledgement of

their indebtedness to Their Majesties the King and Queen. In 1983, they joined hands in launching the “*forest preserving water*” project in response to Her Majesty’s initiative. Since then, they have been accepted into the SUPPORT project, and the mulberry cultivation, silkworm rearing, and silk weaving group was formed for the first time. In 1985, many more occupations were added: blacksmithing, orchid growing, herbal group, and vegetable growing group. When Her Majesty made the second trip to the village, she suggested several more occupations to be developed. With the granting of 100,000 baht in aid, the Ban Chan SUPPORT project was born. The Ban Chan SUPPORT project is another royally sponsored project. With government officials and local people pooling their best efforts, the common venture became firmly established and flourished. The project has been receiving additional financial support from Thai people in other areas, such as fundraising efforts by the Thai SUPPORT committee in the United States.

Not only in Sakon Nakhon Province, but the SUPPORT centers and projects have been expanded to other provinces in the Northeastern region more than 34 projects in Kalasin, Udon Thani, Surin, Mukdahan, Nakhon Phanom, Nong Khai, Buriram, Si Sa Ket, Ubon Ratchathani, Amnat Charoen, Khon Kaen, Maha Sarakham, Chaiyapom, Roi-Et, Yasothon and Loei Province.



Her Majesty the Queen visiting members of the Phu Ethnic Group at Phon Village, Kham Muang District, Kalasin Province. The village had previously been very poor as it is remotely situated. Her Majesty thus encourage the women folk to weave their traditional colorful patterned silk cloth called "Phrae - Wa", which She has popularized both at home and abroad.



Her Majesty the Queen conversing with members of the Ban Kud Sim SUPPORT Foundation Handicrafts Training Centre, Khao Wong District, Kalasin Province.

Her Majesty's long standing activities, untiring efforts, and devotion to the cause of providing supplementary income for Thai people not only in the Northeastern region but in all parts of the country. Her Majesty original intention was obviously to help the Thai people, particularly those in the poorer segment, turn their substandard poverty status into opportunities for material progress and self-reliance by taking advantage of the existing local resources and the people's native artistic gifts. The result is greater security in their own lives and in security as a whole. Further, the entire enterprise serves as an excellent mean for the preservation of Thailand's artistic and cultural traditions. All of these efforts and accomplishments fully justify the epithet given Her Majesty: *"The Mother of the Land"*.

On this royal and auspicious occasion, we would like to humbly express our gratefulness for Her Gracious Majesty Queen Sirikit on Her Majesty the Queen's 78th birthday anniversary. We join the Thai nation in expressing our sincere loyalty to Her Majesty the Queen and wishing Her Majesty excellent health and the greatest of happiness. ***Long Live Her Majesty the Queen.***