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Bitter Skies Glue Moon

Along the border between Thailand and Cambodia, powerful criminal organizations do big business with casinos, prostitution and paedophilia. Cambodian girls and boys from poor families are actually bought to be exploited in the Thai prostitution circuit. Moreover, extreme poorness leads many young persons to find a refuge in drugs. They are called *smoking glue boy*, boys and girls walking in the darkness sniffing glue. They move like ghosts clasping a bottle in their hands as it was a destiny they cannot abandon. Like the beam of a lighthouse, in the darkness of the Cambodian flatland, the Damnok Toek NGO proposes as a reference point to rescue these persons. This NGO works with specialized operators through a series of specific programs addressed to rebuilt a new future for these persons. The work begins at the countryside where they try to convince the families at risk to send their children to the downtown schools, and it continues in the evening along the poor and degraded streets along the casino walls. Damnok Toek, proposes reintegration programs for all the children victims of the human being trade. There are various classes with specific programs, social reintegration playing activities and skilled teachers following the most difficult cases. This work of mine has the purpose to tell about this dark area of the geographic map that concerns two of the main South East Asia countries. The black border line that in this case is not just a cartographic line but an actual living condition for many persons. This is the dark side of this so evident part showing itself on the sexual tourism scenario of the main Asian tourist places. This project wishes to underline the precious work carried out by the Damnok Toek NGO staff who, in the silence, try to deviate the course of events to propose anew hope to these persons.



Aranyaprathet. Thai border – Cambodia. The narrow strip of land between the borders is the scenario of betting in the casinos and of the absolute poorness in the gardens and along the streets.



Lit up in the dark, the sign of a casino, more than showing itself, seems to wanting to hide all what surrounds it. More than a bonded area, this is a territory where business found no obstacle or rule to follow and it developed in the sectors where it would have found difficulties elsewhere: betting, drugs and prostitution.



A Damnok Toek operators embraces a child whose parents beg money to procure the glue.



**A young mother with her child on a blanket in a casino flower-bed: this is all she can call home.
Her drug-addict husband spends all begged money to purchase the glue.**



The operators of the Damnok Toek NGO try to convince a drug-addict boy sniffing glue to follow a recovery program proposed by the organization.



**In Poipet, the glue-sniffing boys are called
are called “smoking glue boys”. This boy
clasps his bottle as if it was a marked
destiny he does not want to give up.**



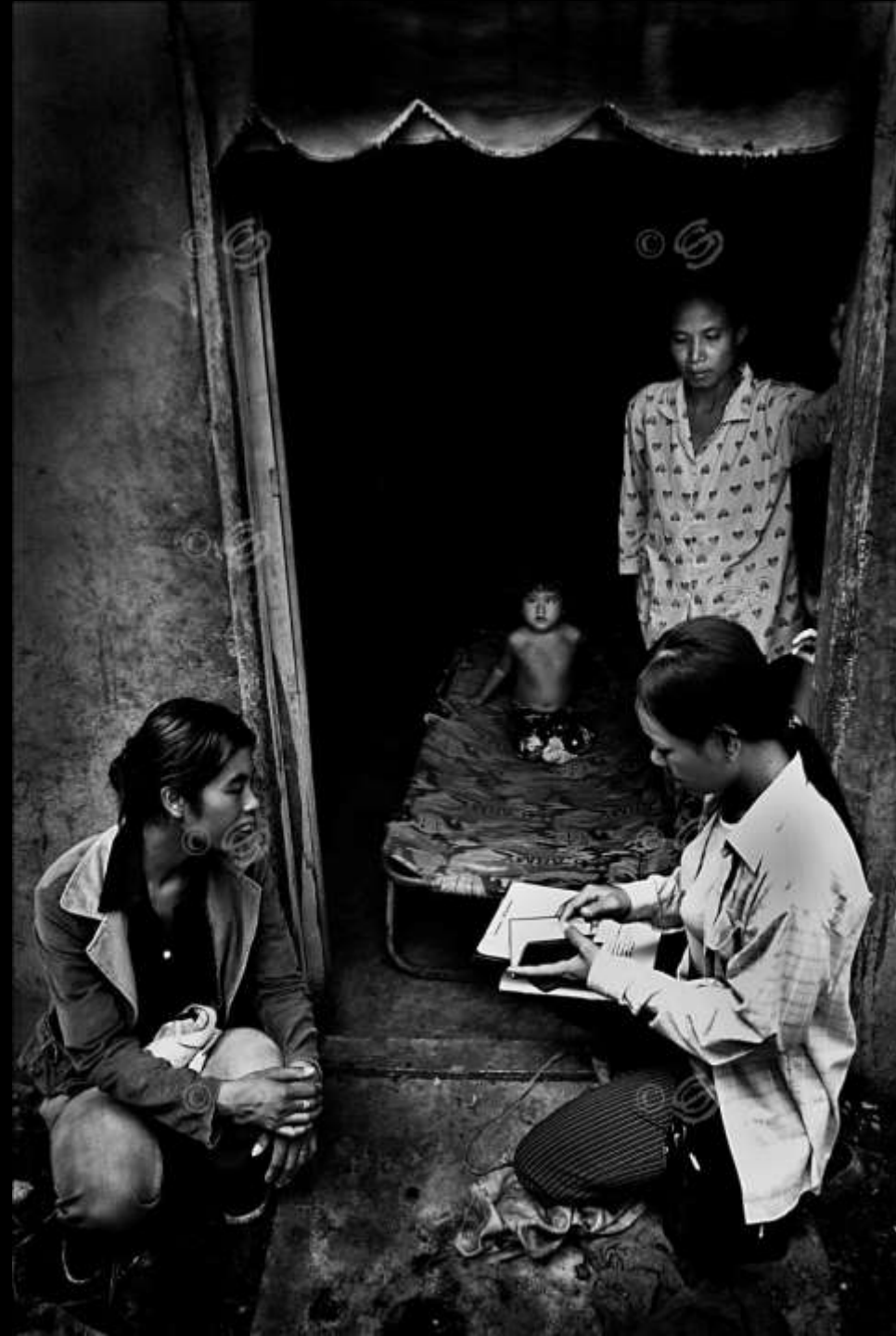
The evening has come and the dark makes its way. An area of bets and tragedies: two worlds living in close contact, sharing the same space but at the extreme opposites of society.



Smaller than her own shade extended on the street, this girl is abandoned to herself along the border.



The NGO operators try to convince the families at risk to send their children to school in the attempt to stop the flow of children toward the Thai prostitution circuits.



Some Damnok Toek operators, after selecting the families at risk, propose their help and recovery program. This woman assesses the idea to adhere to the program, for herself and for her children.



Used to look downward as it there was no sky to hold on to, this child listens to the Damnok Toek operators telling him about their school programs.



Nearly as lost, many children in the Poipet countryside wander without any destination along the streets, as looking for an helpful hand.



The children welcomed by the Damnok Toek association spend the whole day together. Socialization is one of the fundamental requirements of the recovery projects.



A piece of bread with butter and jam: a small snack that a volunteer prepares for children before they go to school.



Thanks to the help of some taxi drivers and their moto-rickshaw, the children following the recovery program may be taken to school.



The uneven roads leading to the school, full of holes and furrows, seem to be a mirror in the open sky of the difficulties that these children have to face.



Math lesson. Every child follows a specific school program depending on his problems and origin.



Many children are bought by the criminal organizations from the poorer families with the promise to give a better life to their children. This boy attends a lesson at the Damnok Toek NGO after having been saved from the criminal organizations.



On the wooden benches of this school, the few books available are shared amongst the children. The available resources are small and often the projects are supported thanks to the contribution of foreign NGOs. In this case Mani Tese, an Italian NGO, has given an important contribution.



It might be the instinct of survival or the inner recovery capacity that allow these children to look at the future leaving behind the tragedies they suffered.



In co-operation with the Thai and Cambodian police, the victims of the human being trade are included in re-introduction programs.



In this class including only six children, the teacher prepares the daily homework.



Thailand: the same country that for many western persons is the sexual tourism paradise, transforms into hell if looked at with the eyes of these young victims.



After the lessons, the children do their homework together before the recreation hour.



Nearly as if it was a reflected image of normality and justice, some children wait on their benches for their teacher to arrive.



Often, in the eyes of these children, the signs of what they lived are evident. Most of them suffered devastating experiences of prostitution and paedophilia in Thailand.



The school of Poipet has been built with the precious contribution of the Mani Tese NGO.



Like those who never turn back, this girl, running toward the opponent, smiles as if she was part of a new game still all to be played.



Recreation is a fundamental recreational element. In the school courtyard, children play soccer looking through the opponent goal as if it was a new idea of the future, reachable and actual, that everybody has access to.



In the school courtyard, these children play writing on the floor with a piece of chalk.



Not yet ready for more demanding lessons, these girls, who have been saved from the criminal prostitution market, are committed in a project that includes small manual works with the purpose to rebuild and develop their relationship and socialization capacities.



Some training courses have been set up to give these boys and girls the opportunity to reach the work market.