Thailand: Boycott the bulldozer movie!

Democracy and environmental groups in Thailand and beyond are shocked and outraged at the way Twentieth Century Fox used the force of power and big money to produce the movie 'The Beach', starring Leonardo DiCaprio.

In late 1998, the US company, which belongs to Rupert Murdoch's News Corp empire, bulldozed and reshaped Maya Beach, part of Phi Phi Islands National Park, for just two weeks of filming because its natural scenery was considered not good enough to project Hollywood's ideal of a "tropical paradise". The film-makers not only committed gross eco-crimes to be prosecuted by law, they also need to be condemned for their contempt of local people who revere Maya as a sacred ground.

To avoid conflicts, the film-makers could have made 'The Beach' scenes as a composite of two different sites or used special effects to achieve their desired vision. But they insisted on going ahead on Phi Phi Leh Island, secure in the knowledge they could count on the support of Thai bureaucrats and politicians who are more preoccupied in using the law to serve their own interests rather than protecting the integrity of the legal system for public good.

Not surprisingly, local residents and national civic groups made all-out efforts to protest at the sale of national park law to Hollywood. Sadly, they were not able to stop the environmental destruction on Phi Phi Leh in time. Still, lawsuits were filed in January 1999 against Fox and the government agencies and officials who allowed the film-makers to ravage a protected area.

As if things were not bad enough, Fox, which is a defendant in an ongoing Thai court case, also won over the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and is now co-sponsoring a joint tourism campaign to promote 'The Beach' movie and Thailand's beaches. This move is a disgrace not only for Thai civil society struggling to phase out harmful policies and corruption, but also for Thailand's image because it shows that its government has deteriorated to a mere stooge of big international capital, willing to sell out everything without pride and dignity.

Despite persistent propaganda efforts to distort the truth and the bullying tactics of the powerful pro-'The Beach' lobby, the Thai protest movement will continue to expose this scandal to the world and fight on for justice in this case. This is of utmost importance to save the country's environmental laws from further sabotage and to prevent other nature reserves from falling victim to unscrupulous encroachers and environmental villains.

To make this struggle a success, we urge the international community to actively support the Justice for Maya Bay campaign.

Please help our friends in Thailand by writing a letter to producer Andrew McDonald telling him you will boycott the film. The address is:

Andrew MacDonald, Producer
c/o Carol Sewell

10201 W. Pico Blvd. Building 89, Room 224
Los Angeles, CA 90035

You can also send an e-mail to the Women's Voices for the Earth (website: www.wildrockies.org/WVE/beach.htm) that has been coordinating an international boycott campaign against 'The Beach', E-mail:
WVE@wildrockies.org telling them you would like to be on the petition.

Source: Tourism Investigation&Monitoring Team - Bangkok