

Speech by His Excellency Mr Noppadon Theppitak, Ambassador of Thailand
At a Reception for the
84th Birthday Anniversary (7th Cycle) of His Majesty King Bhumibol
Adulyadej
and National Day of Thailand
Monday 5 December 2010
Embassy Chancery, Molesworth Street, Wellington

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is my great honour to welcome you all here this evening to celebrate the 84th anniversary of the birth of Thailand's beloved and revered Monarch, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, and the National Day of Thailand.

Also, this year of His Majesty's Life is of particular significance to the Thai people: it represents the completion of the seventh Lunar cycle, that is, the seventh period of twelve years, according to the traditional Thai calendar system.

This past year has also brought several other important events that have affected Thailand in various ways. On 3 July we witnessed a landslide election victory for the new Pheu Thai party, with a subsequent smooth democratic transition. The leader of the new regime Ms Yingluck Shinawatra became the country's first female Prime Minister.

From mid-September, unusually high monsoon rains brought extensive flooding over much of Thailand, affecting in all 68 provinces. Towards the end of the month the flood waters had travelled down country and built up to such proportions that they inundated some areas of greater Bangkok. New Zealand, once again, demonstrated its true friendship by being among the first to lend us a hand in this hour of difficulty. On behalf of the Government and people of Thailand, I would like to express our sincere and deep appreciation for this generous donation from the New Zealand Government for the recovery efforts of those affected from this disaster.

Also in mid-September, here in Wellington, the Embassy moved from its rather cramped quarters in Karori into these beautiful new buildings in which we now stand.

The Thorndon Tavern, which had operated on this site since 1970, was purchased by the Thai Government back in 1995, but various difficulties including a major trans-national financial crisis (in 1997) delayed the re-construction project. The tavern building sat here empty,

seemingly abandoned, for several years. As its condition deteriorated it increasingly became an eyesore and the butt of comments from both local residents and passers-by. However, by late 2007 the Thai Government was able to consider committing funds to the construction of a new Embassy building. I really am very proud to be able to welcome you all here tonight; and I am also very appreciative to Fletcher Construction, who handled the construction works, CB Richard Ellis who guided us through the whole process as our project consultants, and also to FIT Architects, who developed the detailed design on the basis of a concept provided by a Thai architect. May I express our warm thanks to all who have been involved in the project.

For those who are interested, this new building cost us all up to more than 13 Million dollars to build – and the insurance premium is quite phenomenal! However, we do feel that every cent of it is worthwhile, so long as it contributes to the warm and friendly relations which we enjoy with New Zealand. The approval of such a huge budget by the Ministry in Bangkok signifies that the Thai government believes in Wellington and New Zealand and has full faith in this investment.

Furthermore, now that this construction project is completed, and the official Ambassadorial residence is due for a major refurbishment or replacement, I have been entrusted by Bangkok to oversee that project as well. I hope that the new residence will be equally charming, but hopefully not quite as costly.

2011 has also been marked by increasing cooperation between Thailand and New Zealand in many different areas. A major Joint Review of the 2005 Thailand – New Zealand Closer Economic Partnership agreement was undertaken, and was endorsed by the New Zealand Minister of Trade, Honourable Tim Groser, and the Thai Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Commerce, Kittiratt Na-Ranong, at Honolulu on 12 November. They agreed that our bilateral trade and economic relations were in an extremely positive state. Thailand will be hosting a Joint Ministerial Commission under the CEP agreement during 2012, to look at ways to further expand our trade and investment between the two countries, as well as working together on regional integration in the Asia-Pacific. It is also hoped that the negotiations on the second stage of the CEP agreement can be concluded during 2012.

Also in the sphere of economic cooperation, the Asia - NZ Young Leaders Network programme provides funding for young business leaders to undergo internships in Asian countries, including in Thailand. I hope that more opportunities can be found to expand this programme. Also, early next year I will be leading a delegation of New Zealand investors and business leaders to Thailand to explore opportunities for

them to be more closely involved in Thailand's vibrant economy at the heart of South-east Asia.

In 2011, cooperation was deepened in new spheres as such as science, technology and innovation, as a delegation of top scientists and innovators from Thailand visited New Zealand to share notes with top New Zealand researchers and to seek opportunities for practical cooperation particularly in the areas of renewable energy generation, biotechnology and agriculture and food production. I understand that Thailand may grant a scholarship to Otago University for a post-graduate student to undertake a research project in Thailand.

In education, New Zealand continues to be the main destination of choice for many Thai students at various levels. Victoria University of Wellington recently signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand to sponsor a programme for senior civil servants from Thailand to gain direct experience in the English language and approaches to public policy. New Zealand is the first country to formulate such an agreement to help train top officials from the Thai government.

Relations between our defence forces have also continued to deepen, with several high level visits during the past year. Thailand will be hosting a defence delegation from New Zealand during 2012 including the Secretary of Defence Mr John McKinnon, and hopefully with higher level of involvement as well.

Since we have invested so much in installing wonderful facilities in this building, we also plan to make the best use of them. So, on 13 December the Embassy, on behalf of the ASEAN Committee in Wellington will be hosting a major seminar entitled "ASEAN in the Global Community," to look at the opportunities in store as the Association of South East Asian Nations becomes the ASEAN Community and a single market in 2015. The keynote speaker will be a distinguished former Foreign Minister of Indonesia; and it is hoped that a speaker of similar standing from New Zealand will also be available to address the seminar. Those of you who are interested in the evolution of the ASEAN Community and New Zealand's relations and potentials with ASEAN are warmly invited to contact the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs to register for attendance.

This year marked the 55th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Thailand and New Zealand. 2012 will mark the 50th anniversary of the visit to New Zealand by His Majesty the King and Her Majesty Queen Sirikit. It was the first visit to New Zealand by any foreign Monarch and Their Majesties did much to cement together the developing

close friendship between our two countries. It is hoped that there will be another Royal Visit during 2012.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank you again for coming here tonight to celebrate His Majesty the King's seventh cycle or 84th birthday anniversary, the National Day of Thailand.

And, since we are now approaching the Christmas season, I'd like to take this opportunity to wish you all a very merry Christmas, a happy New Year and safe and enjoyable holidays.

I now have the honour to propose a toast to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, Queen of New Zealand, to the Government and the people of New Zealand and to the ever closer Thai – New Zealand friendship.

To Her Majesty the Queen.
