

**Remarks at Gala Dinner at Beehive Banquet Hall**  
**Monday 27 August 2012**

**The Honourable Christopher Finlayson**, Attorney-General, Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage, Minister for Treaty of Waitangi Negotiations and Associate Minister of Maori Affairs;

**Honourable Tim Groser**, Minister of Trade, Minister responsible for International Climate Change Negotiations, Associate Minister of Foreign Affairs;

**Honourable Phil Goff**, Opposition Labour Party Spokesperson on Foreign Affairs and Trade, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Former Leader of the Opposition;

**Honourable Peter Dunne**, Minister of Revenue, Associate Minister of Conservation, Associate Minister of Health;

**Honourable Chris Tremain**, Minister of Internal Affairs, Minister of Civil Defence, Associate Minister of Tourism;

**Honourable Craig Foss**, Minister of Commerce, Minister of Broadcasting, Associate Minister for ACC, Associate Minister of Education

**Distinguished Members of Parliament, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:**

Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa;

Sawasdee krap;

And good evening to everyone.

It is my great honour to be able to welcome you all here this evening. I also consider myself very privileged to have the Honourable Christopher Finlayson very kindly host our Gala Dinner here in the Beehive for the second year in a row. Thank you, Chris; and thank you also for your kind words of welcome.

Last year's event, however, was convened for a different cause. On this occasion, we wish to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the His Majesty the King's and Her Majesty the Queen's visit to New Zealand. The Beehive seemed to be the most appropriate venue to do so, since it sits on bascially

the very same spot where Their Majesties enjoyed a State Luncheon along with the then Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Keith Holyoake and Mrs Holyoake , among others. That Luncheon took place in what was in 1962 called the *Social Hall*, located pretty much right where this Beehive stands today.

I understand that Their Majesties were the first foreign royals to pay an Official Visit to New Zealand, making it an event of unique importance in New Zealand history, and also bringing the two countries that much closer together. For us Thais who have any relation with New Zealand, living here either temporarily or permanently, we fondly recall that Royal Visit as a precious memory, connecting us together as two peoples.

In order to celebrate this historic event I approached Dr Sugree Charoensook, Director of the Thailand Philharmonic Orchestra to consider bringing the orchestra to New Zealand to present one or more concerts. The TPO was founded in 2005 and has developed a distinguished reputation for the highest quality of both Thai and western classical music, including gaining several major awards. It is regularly joined by soloists, players and conductors from other countries. The current line-up of musicians includes more than 15 nationalities.

I really am very honoured that Dr Sugree and the Orchestra's Board chose to bring the orchestra to New Zealand, whilst also declining invitations to perform in other countries during the current season. May I express my very sincere appreciation for that decision. But more than that, the Orchestra has been able to obtain the sponsorship of several Thai private sector donors to pay for this trip to New Zealand: which has saved my budget a lot.

The Orchestra will be performing at the Aotea Centre in Auckland on Thursday night: with a programme to include Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor, as well as a selection of His Majesty The King's own musical compositions. There will also be a performance at King's College in Auckland on Wednesday morning.

Unfortunately for Wellington, despite our best efforts, we were not able to secure a suitable venue for the orchestra to perform. However, we do have here tonight four members of the orchestra who will play for you a

little later on as a string quartet. And, in a special tribute to His Majesty the King: they will be playing two of His Majesty's own musical compositions: "Love" and "Candlelight Blues."

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It really is great to see so many members of the New Zealand Government and Opposition here with us tonight. Thank you to each of you for making the effort to join us: your presence here signals the growing closeness between our two governments and peoples. I'd also like to acknowledge the following:

**Distinguished Members of Parliament;** Mr. John Hayes ONZM, Colin King, Melissa Lee, Jacqui Dean and Dr. Cam Calder;

**Chief of the Armed Forces,** Lieutenant General Rhys Jones, together with his lovely wife, Mrs Debbie Jones;

**Mayor of Hastings:** Mr. Lawrence Yule;

**Deputy Mayor of Wellington and Chancellor of Victoria University** Mr. Ian McKinnon;

**Vice Chancellor of Victoria University,** Professor Pat Walsh, who over the past few years in particular has been very active in working to strengthen education relations between New Zealand and Thailand;

Please also welcome **Miss Universe New Zealand 2012,** Miss Talia Bennett, together with her First Runner up, Miss **Lauren Mann,** and Miss Hutt Valley, **Rachel Millns.** These lovely young ladies will be travelling to Thailand later this year to help promote people-to-people connectivity. I'm very appreciative of their willingness to assist with strengthening bilateral relations, bringing New Zealand and Thailand closer together in new endeavours.

Also, I am very honoured to be able to welcome so many guests who have travelled from Thailand to be here tonight and some of them are the main sponsors for the TPO to be in New Zealand. I'd like to take a few minutes to introduce some of them to you.

Firstly, **His Excellency Mr Viroon Tejchapaibul** , Deputy Minister of Finance, representing the Government of Thailand, and

**Khunying Patama Leeswadtrakul**, current Chairperson of the Board of Thailand Philharmonic Orchestra, together with her husband Ms Somsak Leeswadtrakul, Chairman of G-Steel. PCL.

Both His Excellency Mr Viroon and Khunying Patama will be speaking to you later on this evening.

**Mr Bhanapot Damapong**, the first Honorary Chairman of the Orchestra; Bhanapot has extensive experience in telecommunications business, and is currently chairman of the board of directors of Rama 9 General Hospital in Bangkok. Together with **Mrs Busaba Damapong**, his wife, and also Chairman and President of SC Asset Public Company Ltd, one of the largest residential property developers in Thailand.

**Dr Sugree Charoensook**, Founder and Director of the TPO, and Dean of the School of Music of Mahidol University, Bangkok; together with **Mrs Ariya Charoensook**, his wife.

**Ms Manee Rodeganok**, founder and director of the AES Group of Companies, representing various high tech products and services from all over the world, including the Gallagher (กัวลาลัมเปอร์) Group of New Zealand.

We are also joined by:

**Mr Pongkit Suttapong**, now a New Zealand resident; Pongkit was formerly a member of the TPO board and has also been the first South East Asia regional manager for Nokia Mobile Phone; and as founder and current vice chairman of Siam Future Development PLC, a developer of shopping centers, in partnership with IKEA of Sweden developed the largest shopping mall in South East Asia, at home in Bangkok;

together with **Mrs Parichart Suttapong**, his wife, who is currently a member of the TPO Board and a Director of Nash Kelly International Jewelry.

And: **Dr Nuttawat Visalthanachoti**, Associate Professor in Finance at Massey University, Albany Campus; together with **Mrs Jinda Visalthanachoti**, his wife.

I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to all those who have helped with organizing this evening's programme: especially **the**

**Honourable Christopher Finlayson**, who has so very kindly hosted us here this evening;

**Farib Sos**, Director of the Asia Forum, who has assisted us in so many ways. Thank you, Farib.

I'd also like once again to thank all the sponsors, the dancers, the chefs, the waiting staff, my own Embassy staff for their assistance, and everyone who has contributed in some way to making this event run smoothly.

And thanks also to all of you for coming along: we are very delighted to have your company. Please enjoy the evening.

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