

Speech by His Excellency Mr Noppadon Theppitak, Ambassador of Thailand
At the 22nd Graduation Ceremony
International Pacific College, Palmerston North
Thursday 13 December 2012

His Worship Mr Jono Naylor, Mayor of Palmerston North

Professor Wayne Edwards OBE, President of IPC

Mr Hiroshi Ohashi MNZM, Chairman of the Board of Trustees and CEO

Mrs Setsuko Ohashi, Deputy Chairperson, International Education
Foundation (NZ) Incorporated

His Excellency Mr Antonius Agus Sriyono, Ambassador of Indonesia

Mr Takahashi Ato, First Secretary & Head of the Japan Information and
Cultural Centre

Graduands,

Staff and students,

Parents and family members of students,

Other guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is my great honour to be here today and to speak to you on this
the 22nd Graduation Ceremony for the International Pacific College.

The IPC has a very distinguished history, being founded in 1990 by
the Soshi Educational Group of Japan, which selected this location out of
many potential sites around the Pacific rim, in the late 1980s. I am very
honoured to have been invited to be a part of that history today. And
each of you are also a part of the developing story of IPC: particularly the
graduating students.

But it's not only the story of the times you have spent here and the
people you have met, of which I'm sure you will often look back on with
fondness in the years to come; it's through the knowledge and skills you
have learned while here, the persons that you have all grown to become,
and I'm sure will continue to grow, as you go out to spread influences for
good as you travel through the rest of your journey in life beyond the
college's walls.

IPC makes a substantial contribution to the local economy here in
Palmerston North, and New Zealand, but through its role in equipping
students to perform in the international arena in various capacities, I
believe that the college makes a very worthwhile contribution to the
wider region, including Asia, the Pacific and the Americas.

And in sending out graduands to fulfill roles in such realms as
international relations, government, military and international business

spheres, a comparatively small college here in Aokautere, Palmerston North, in the relatively small and peaceful corner of the South Pacific, does indeed play an important role in the world, much bigger than the campus itself.

Let's think for a moment about the hobbit Bilbo Baggins, from the story by J.R.R. Tolkien, recently made into another of Sir Peter Jackson's box-office smashing movies. Bilbo started off thinking of himself as a small and insignificant person, in a small and quiet land, the Shire; who would most likely simply carry on quite happily with his peaceful and insignificant life. But when he was called out into the great unknown realms of Middle Earth, he discovered in the end that he could actually play a not insignificant part in events and happenings much, much bigger than himself and anything he had experienced before or even imagined.

I would like to suggest to all of you students graduating from IPC, the peaceful and happy campus, to take upon yourself some of the same sense of adventure with which Bilbo set off towards the Misty Mountains and beyond.

This wider Asia-Pacific region faces a very exciting future indeed. And I believe that it can be a very positive future, as the several nations and economies increasingly learn to cooperate more closely together for each other's mutual benefits, towards greater development and a better standard of living and experience of life for all people: which I believe are the most worthy goals that we can aim at.

In recent times we have been witnesses to the development of a new regional architecture, which seems to have really taken off in the wake of Asia's recovery from the 1997 'Asian infection' financial crisis. ASEAN in particular, now more than 40 years young, has determined to take regional integration a step further by becoming a fully integrated Community in 2015.

But ASEAN has also become a catalyst for the integration of the whole East Asia region, through several international fora and projects, such as the East Asia Summit and the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Area, through which Australia and New Zealand have become integral parts of the ASEAN economic sphere.

However, though from my perspective as a Thai, ASEAN and its links with the wider region are of vital importance; ASEAN is only a part of the whole story. There is also APEC and the Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations, for example, plus many other aspects of international relations in the wider Asia-Pacific region.

And at the back of it all is the very important phenomenon of a shift of the world's centre of economic gravity from somewhere in central or Northern Europe, about 50 or 100 years ago, to perhaps somewhere else east of the Ural mountains, within perhaps the next 10 to 20 years.

Some commentators have pointed out that the economic vibrancy of Asia as a whole was the historical norm, prior to the industrial revolution in Europe, which brought in so many new advantageous technologies; and that what we are seeing now, in this century, is a return to that historical norm. That may well be so, but I feel that we really shouldn't look too much into the past to build our future. Our future can be so much more interesting and exciting, as it includes so many more new factors than existed in the past. And our future in this new integrated world must be an essentially human future, not merely a future of free trade, or anything else to do with facts and figures more than with people.

Because as we come closer together, and get to know each other better - across borders, across cultures, across oceans and continents - it becomes more and more important for us all to appreciate our differences. Our differences in culture, in backgrounds, and possibly also in values. And for that to take place we must first know who we are ourselves, where we are from, and the traditions of our own communities. To first stand strong in our own place; and from that position of strength, to go on to meet and mingle with others from other backgrounds.

The 106 graduands here today have come together at IPC from as many 13 different countries, each with their own languages and traditions, with different things that make you each feel proud to be who you are. I'm sure that you have spent much of the past three or four years there making friends with each other across the boundaries that in previous centuries have divided mankind. I'm sure that you have all learned so much from each other: and as you go out from those peaceful walls, from that peaceful place of meeting, I'm sure you will all continue to build on that richness that you have found through those interactions.

For myself as Ambassador of Thailand to New Zealand, I have focused my efforts over the past three years of my current tenure, not only to fostering closer economic relations, but also on cultural and educational matters, which I feel helps to build closer relations between our two countries at the human level.

In January this year I led a delegation of New Zealand business people and investors on a 'fact finding' mission in Thailand. Some of them were interested in importing commodities, which is wonderful, but

there were also some members of the delegation who are heavily involved in the New Zealand film industry, which as we all know well, has a particularly active centre in Miramar, Wellington. I believe that a memorandum of understanding between Thailand and New Zealand will be concluded soon, to facilitate cooperation and joint-ventures in making films, TV dramas, film-production and animation. There is a big potential for this to take off: it could result in up to a billion New Zealand dollars in combined business.

In March I welcomed a high-level delegation from Charoen Pokphand, a major Thai based multi-national retail, foodstuffs and agribusiness conglomerate, on a tour of various suppliers in New Zealand. Some of the premium New Zealand products, such as choice lamb and venison cutlets, green-lipped mussels, deep sea fish and crayfish, will be marketed in supermarkets throughout Thailand, but also many products will be re-exported to a network of supermarkets and hypermarkets throughout China, Japan and Korea – many of the products retaining the original New Zealand producers' labels.

During May – July, I dispatched a group of four volunteer English teachers from New Zealand to Khon Kaen province in Thailand's Northeast region, to teach English to about 2,000 students in various schools around the province, who might otherwise not have had a chance to hear and to learn from native English speakers.

In August we welcomed the Thailand Philharmonic Orchestra, Thailand's and one of Asia's finest classical orchestras, to perform in Auckland and Wellington in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the 1962 Royal Visit to New Zealand by Their Majesties the King and Queen of Thailand.

In October, I led a delegation comprising Miss Universe New Zealand 2012, Miss Talia Bennett, together with her first and second runners up, and some officials of the Miss Universe New Zealand organisation, to promote Thailand as a tourist destination.

And I look forward to being involved in similar projects over the remainder of my term here. Though the volume of trade between Thailand and New Zealand is not very high, I believe that there is still potential to increase it more. And in many other areas as well, there is so much that we can do and achieve together as two peoples, Thai and New Zealand.

I have also tried to encourage an increase in the level of engagement that Thailand has with the Pacific Islands Forum countries,

looking at ways to make use of New Zealand's extensive links there in tri-lateral cooperation. But this is only an example of the whole interlinked story of the Asia –Pacific region and its developing future, which you graduands can become a part of forming.

Therefore, I'd like to heartily congratulate you all on your attainments, and may I also wish you the very best as you continue on your adventures beyond your peaceful campus, either in developing your careers in the international arena, or in further study, or wherever your hearts may take you.

But I'd also like to acknowledge the many prominent public figures here today and all of you, for the support that you are lending to IPC. I'd also like to acknowledge the work of the many lecturers and other members of staff, for the wonderful work they have all done in contributing to the success of today's graduands. And also I'd like to acknowledge the support that the parents and other family and friends have given. You have all become a part of the IPC story.

Thank you also for allowing me to be a part of your story; perhaps even, your adventure – as you set your sights on the exciting developments in the world of today and tomorrow. Thank you.