

**Address by
His Excellency Mr. Noppadon Theppitak, Ambassador of Thailand
At a Reception on the Occasion of
the 87th Birthday Anniversary of His Majesty the King of Thailand
and the National Day of Thailand
4 December 2014
Royal Thai Embassy, Wellington.**

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**Members of Parliament,
Mr. John Allen, Chief Executive and Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade,
Excellencies,
High Commissioners,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is my great honour and privilege to welcome you here this evening to celebrate the **87th Birthday Anniversary of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej**, on the 5th December.

Now in the **69th year** of His reign, His Majesty is the longest reigning monarch in the world today and in Thai history.

His Majesty King Bhumibol is the pillar of Thailand's national stability and unity, having spent long years of his life devoted to the development of the country and to improve the lives of his people. For Thai people everywhere, His Majesty is recognized and appreciated in the true sense of **"the Father of the Land."**

So let me make a point here. We are gathered today not only to celebrate His Majesty's birthday, but to also welcome His Majesty's quick recovery from a minor surgery in early October, despite his frail age. The Thai people feel blessed and are very touched by the outpour of goodwill messages by members of the Diplomatic Corps in Bangkok as well as foreign visitors.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you know, this past year, Thailand came to a difficult political impasse. However, we are moving forward and are now well into our Roadmap for reform. We have completed the second phase and are now moving into the final phase. We have set up a national committee to work on drafting our new constitution which will guide our general elections set for the end of next year or the beginning of 2016. The committee is taking elaborate steps to consult all social stakeholders in this drafting process.

As an avid golfer, I prefer to compare the Thai political situation with golf. When a golfer messes up his game and repeats too many mistakes, he has to go for a total repair of his swing, starting again from the beginning. This is not a sign of giving up. On the contrary, it indicates the determination of a true golfer to get the game right.

What I am saying is that when it comes to democracy, Thailand is not giving up. Rather, we are trying to get it right, starting from the fundamental elements. We want to make our democracy stable, sustainable and functional for generations to come. A democracy that is inclusive and responsive to its people.

Quite frankly, we felt hurt when the New Zealand Government expressed its disappointment in our political situation. However, we do appreciate that you have given us time and space to work things out internally. This is something we do not take for granted. We also appreciate that New Zealand is considering the possibility of providing some experts on democratic processes, good governance and rule of law to offer advice and recommendations on taking our reform process forward.

In fact, just yesterday we concluded a successful seminar entitled “On the Path to Reform” in Bangkok. We were very pleased that experts from the IPU, United States, Portugal, South Korea, Japan, Switzerland, Australia, Germany and many more countries travelled all the way to Bangkok to speak at the forum, and provided us with many useful ideas. We also hope that our friends in New Zealand would soon join other partners to support us in our reform process.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Times are getting harder. We are all facing a global economic recession, every region alike. Neither Thailand nor New Zealand is exempted from the adverse effects of this financial slowdown.

However, as an integrated entity, ASEAN continues to be the most dynamic and attractive region for business and investment, with new opportunities sprouting up in every corner. Myanmar is opening up its country and liberalizing its trade and investment policies, Vietnam’s economy is expanding enormously, and Cambodia still hosts vast avenues for investment. And against this backdrop, Thailand remains the second largest economy in the region, playing the strategic role of the vital link in global supply chains for ASEAN with the rest of the world.

Recognizing this strategic role to complete connectivity links within the region, the Thai Government has announced a master plan to upgrade our transportation infrastructure, as part of the “mega projects,” to improve overall economic competitiveness. Apart from upgrading the land and air links between

Thailand with its six neighbouring countries, implementing water management projects to tackle drought and flooding, we also plan to improve city rail links and overhaul the public transportation system in Bangkok.

This is why Thailand is and will always remain the region's hub for investment and logistics. With a strong economic foundation and a policy geared towards increasing a favourable business environment, Thailand will continue to be an indispensable part of the region and of ASEAN. That's why foreign investors continue to use Thailand as production bases or as regional headquarters, despite the political situation and the great flood in 2011. They know that there are comparative advantages in Thailand that cannot be replicated anywhere else.

On top of that, ASEAN is actively engaging in negotiations with its dialogue partners to conclude several free trade agreements, such as the upgrading of the ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement and the RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership). All these cooperation frameworks ensure that windows of economic opportunities will remain open for future generations--opportunities that will extend beyond this region and provide a promising future for Kiwis and Thais alike.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Thai government, I wish to congratulate the Right Honourable John Key, Prime Minister of New Zealand, for the recent election victory, winning for both him, and the National-led government, a third consecutive term in office. And I am confident that, under the present New Zealand government, the partnership for cooperation and development between Thailand and New Zealand will be strengthened in all dimensions.

New Zealand excels in its world class education system, and this is why it's the most important area for cooperation with Thailand. Our partnership in education has progressed even more in recent years. Agreements, as well as tangible projects and exchanges, have proceeded between several New Zealand universities, including Victoria, AUT, Massey, Lincoln, University of Canterbury, Otago and Auckland universities, and various partner institutes in Thailand.

What I am most happy about is that the academic fields have extended more towards science, innovations and technology. But of course, exchanges in Thai and English languages still remain the most prominent area. In the near future, we hope that an integrated Thai Studies programme or institute may be established in New Zealand, to serve as a focus point for research and exchange between the universities in both countries.

I want to particularly note that our hard work has paid off. New Zealand universities are now becoming more and more popular among Thai students who wish to pursue higher education abroad, replacing some universities in the United States and Europe. So I won't be surprised if in the near future, we will have Thai graduates speaking fluent Kiwi instead of Aussie or American. Take me for example. After living here for four years and seven months, my strong accent has already transformed into a combined Tenglish plus Kiwi accent. No worries, eh, mate?

Speaking of cultural exchange, I have to mention one great idea PM Key made during his official visit to Thailand last year. Since the Thai Government aspires to make Thai food the kitchen of the world, PM Key suggested, why not cook the flavourable Thai dishes with premium New Zealand ingredients? And since he sparked up this idea, it has now become a tangible success. We're already cooking up Thai green curry with New Zealand Angus beef, and the famous Masaman curry is now even more popular as it is cooked with New Zealand choice lamb. Actually, all Thai dishes go well with New Zealand wines. My personal favourite is the renowned pinot noir. So someone should start packaging that into the whole Thai culinary experience.

In August this year, our Embassy once again worked on our "*Beauty Diplomacy*" skills. We sponsored the 25 finalists of the 2014 Miss Universe New Zealand pageant to visit Thailand as "*Kiwi Good-will Ambassadors*," to promote cultural exchange and understanding, connecting Thais and Kiwis even closer together. Many new friends were made, while the already established partnership was taken to a higher level when the Miss Universe Thailand winner for 2013 was invited by the Miss Universe New Zealand organization to be one of the guest judges for the 2014 pageant in Auckland just this past September.

I have to say that this indeed marks a milestone in our bilateral cooperation, because this shows that our beauty contestants have looked beyond competition and instead have embraced a much more meaningful friendship. I am hopeful that this partnership will continue to bear fruit in drawing our two peoples closer together. And I am pleased to acknowledge the presence here this evening of Miss Universe New Zealand 2014, Miss Rachel Milln, together with the Director of Miss Universe New Zealand, Mr. Nigel Godfrey. Thanks to you both for joining us.

Let me move on to our bilateral cooperation in the multilateral framework. I would like to mention again that Thailand heartily welcomed the launch of the '*New Zealand Inc. ASEAN Strategy*' in July 2013. We look forward to celebrating together the Commemorative ASEAN – New Zealand Summit to be held in Kuala Lumpur in 2015, marking 40 remarkable years of New Zealand's valuable partnership with ASEAN.

In the realm of the UN, Thailand wishes to once again congratulate New Zealand for recently winning a seat at the UN Security Council for 2015-16. We are especially happy because we voted for New Zealand. And we voted for New Zealand not just because we're friends. We voted for New Zealand because we are confident that New Zealand will defend the very same interests and values we share, those of smaller and developing countries. It is our hope that one day Thailand too, will have the chance to serve side by side with New Zealand at the UN Security Council.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I reach the end of my speech, I must at this juncture announce that my time here in New Zealand will soon also be drawing to a close. I expect to be moving to my next assignment early in the new year. My time here, from March 2010 until today, has provided me with some of the most memorable and impressive moments in my life. I have been incredibly honoured to have been able to serve the cause of enhancing and expanding the already excellent relationship between Thailand and New Zealand. I also consider myself privileged to have met and interacted so with many of you here this evening over these past few years.

Thank you especially to Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Mr John Allen for joining us tonight to represent the New Zealand government. And thanks also to all of you for joining us to celebrate His Majesty the King's 87th Birthday Anniversary and the National Day of Thailand.

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

To Her Majesty the Queen.
