

Address by  
 His Excellency Mr Maris Sangiampongsa, Ambassador of Thailand  
 At a Reception on the Occasion of  
 the 88th Birthday Anniversary of His Majesty the King of Thailand  
 and the National Day of Thailand  
 1 December 2015  
 Royal Thai Embassy, Wellington  
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**Khun Brook Barrington, Chief Executive and Secretary of  
 Foreign Affairs and Trade,  
 Excellencies,  
 Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is indeed an honour and privilege for me to welcome all of you here this evening to celebrate the **88th Birthday Anniversary** of **His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej**, and the National Day of Thailand.

Now in the **70<sup>th</sup> year** of His reign, His Majesty is the longest reigning monarch in the world and in Thai history.

His Majesty King Bhumibol is currently continuing to recover his health, and remains fully active in sharing concerns for the well-being of the Thai people.

His Majesty's Birthday this year will be marked by an important event entitled "*Bike for Dad*," on 11 December; like in August this year when His Royal Highness the Crown Prince led a mass bicycle event entitled "*Bike for Mum*" to celebrate the 83<sup>rd</sup> Birthday anniversary of Her Majesty the Queen of Thailand. More than 500,000 cyclists, including New Zealand Ambassador to Thailand, Mr. Ben

King, are expected to participate in this cycling event. This will demonstrate how the Monarch remains beloved and an inspiration for all Thai people.

The '*Bike for Dad*' events will also be held in another 66 cities around the world, including in Wellington. Members of the Thai community and Kiwi families and friends will be cycling along the Wellington waterfront on 11 December - and you all are very welcome to be there to cheer us along!

### **Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

After the military intervention took place to stop the violence caused by the prolonged political turmoil in Thailand, the National Council for Peace and Order was formed to restore peace and order. A 3 phase-Roadmap for Reconciliation, Reforms and Elections was announced as a guideline for the country to move forwards.

Nowadays, we are in phase 2, moving ahead on comprehensive inclusive reforms. We expect our Roadmap to end with General Elections, followed by a new democratically-elected Government in the middle of 2017.

Meanwhile, during this transitional period, we remain fully committed to good governance, transparency, the rule of law and the full protection and promotion of human rights - as well as guaranteed freedoms with responsibility.

However, I would like to emphasize that the ultimate objective of the Roadmap is not only to hold General Elections and

form a new Government but also to reestablish our own sustainable democracy. Thailand is learning from the mistakes of the past and is now moving firmly forwards to our own Thai democracy since there is no “One Size Fits All Democracy”.

### **Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Although Thailand has been through political disturbances, our economic fundamentals are strong and the economy is stable. We expect GDP growth at 2.7-3.2 % this year, up from the dip down to 0.9% in 2014. Furthermore, tourist numbers are expected to reach or exceed 30 million by the end of this year, making Thailand one of the biggest tourist destinations in Asia.

The government continues to emphasize infrastructure development, digital economy, water management, energy sector reforms, promotion of foreign direct investment, promoting the establishment of regional operating headquarters; and fostering increased regional trade.

Furthermore, Special Economic Zones along the border between Thailand and neighboring countries have been launched to include measures promoting investment privileges, one-stop services, facilitating the movement of migrant workers and developing more infrastructure in these border areas. Cross-border trade already comprises around 15% of Thailand’s bilateral trade and this will undoubtedly increase with the establishment of these Special Economic Zones - strengthening local economies and their links into the regional supply chains, resources and markets.

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We have been working very hard on enhancing the connections between Thailand and New Zealand, at all levels, including people-to-people, business-to-business and government-to-government.

I led a group of New Zealand businessmen from major companies to visit Thailand last September. All of them expressed no concern about the situation in Thailand and appreciated the opportunity to explore business and investment potentials in Thailand, and look forward to further developing their business-to-business links with Thai companies.

We have also been involved in promoting educational exchanges at various levels. Almost 20 volunteer English teachers from New Zealand have been sent to Thailand since 2011 to teach English and Kiwi culture to Thai children. Moreover, a number of Kiwi students around New Zealand have been selected from up to 100 applicants each year, and sent to Thailand to learn Thai culture and Thai way of life. Thanks to this project, we have been informed that Kapiti College has signed MoUs with Thai schools and 13 students from Kapiti College visited Thailand just last week to make friends with Thai students and to experience “Thainess”.

To me, it seems these business-to-business and people-to-people layers have proven their value by moving ahead to enhance

relations with Thailand. In fact, it reflects the wishes of the people of New Zealand, the fundamental layer of relations.

Thailand and New Zealand have enjoyed close and cordial relations for 59 years. Thailand is one of the countries in Asia which has the longest history of diplomatic relations with New Zealand. Next year both of us have agreed to have commemorative events to celebrate the 60th anniversary of our diplomatic relations. We had a fruitful discussion at the 10th Thailand-New Zealand Senior Officials' Talks in Bangkok in July this year, co-chaired by Khun Brook Barrington. And next year will be a good time for both sides to hold a "Retreat" so that we can sit together in Wellington, make a joint assessment on what we have done so far, and focus on specific areas of cooperation where we can move forward together.

### **Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The Kuala Lumpur Declaration on the Establishment of the ASEAN Community was signed and witnessed by the international community on 22 November this year. At the end of the year, the Association of South East Asian Nations will become the ASEAN Community, creating a single market and single production base with 600 million population. Thailand as the second largest economy in ASEAN will continue to play a strategic role of linkage in global supply chains for ASEAN with rest of the world.

In fact, 30 years ago, no one expected that ASEAN would become one. We were so different from one another in politics, economic, religions, languages and ways of living. We have already

proved that our diversities are our strength, and we have “ASEAN Way” as our own pattern of diplomacy which has served us well. Today, we are under one roof and becoming an outstanding sub-regional grouping in the rising Asia.

As a community under one roof, ASEAN will become the most dynamic and attractive place for business and investment. Apart from founding members bringing prosperities to the region, Vietnam’s economy is expanding enormously while Cambodia and Laos still present vast opportunity for foreign investment. Recently, the international community has witnessed the successful general elections in Myanmar. Thailand as a close friend to Myanmar continues to support Myanmar moving forwards in terms of politics and economics. Thanks to the Constructive Engagement policy towards Myanmar, initiated by Thailand and supported by ASEAN where ASEAN friends stood side by side with Myanmar through the difficult times of economic sanction. Today, the people of Myanmar will have their own bright futures. That is what friends are for.

And in this context, this year ASEAN and New Zealand have celebrated the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their relations. I would like to commend the ASEAN Committee in Wellington and NZ MFAT for the successful activities organized here in New Zealand and in many ASEAN Capitals. Asia-NZ Foundation, Auckland University of Technology, ASEAN-NZ Business Council and others also joined us in organizing the commemorative activities such as the visit of ASEAN Secretary-General to NZ, ASEAN Day Reception, ASEAN Film

Festival, ASEAN Media Familiarization Tour, ASEAN Forum and so on.

I also wish to congratulate to both of us for elevating our relationship to a Strategic Partnership. I truly believe the ASEAN-New Zealand Plan of Action (2016-2020), which was launched at the ASEAN-New Zealand Commemorative Summit to mark the 40th Anniversary of the Dialogue Relations last month in Malaysia, will be an important guideline to enhance our relations and cooperation.

### **Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Last September in New York, Thailand was endorsed as Chairman of the Group of 77 developing countries or G77 for the 2016 term. This reflects the international community's confidence and trust in Thailand on the global stage. The Chairmanship will provide the opportunity for Thailand to enhance cooperation between the developing countries.

We will show to the world that we are ready to serve as a "bridge builder" among the G77 members and with other UN member states. Thailand has potential and capabilities to make a valuable contribution to the group to promote development and to share experiences and expertise on development as well as to protect the interests of the G77.

We praise New Zealand's active and constructive Chairmanship in the UNSC in strengthening the organization, promoting global peace and security, and defending the interests of small and developing countries. Those were reasons for Thailand to

vote for New Zealand. We also appreciate New Zealand for sharing with us their experiences on her campaign and role in the UNSC. We hope that Thailand will also have a chance to serve with New Zealand on the UNSC in 2017-2018.

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I wish to thank, Khun Brook Barrington, for being with us tonight as a representative of New Zealand government. I'd like also to express my gratitude to all of you for joining us to celebrate this auspicious occasion.

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.

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