

**Opening Remarks by  
H.E. Mr. Surapong Tovichakchaikul  
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand  
at the High-Level Forum on 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of ASEAN-China Strategic Partnership  
2 August 2013, Bangkok**

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**Your Excellency Mr. Wang Yi (หวัง อี้), Minister of Foreign Affairs of the  
People's Republic of China,**

**Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

A very good morning.

It gives me great pleasure to warmly welcome all of you to the High-Level Forum on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ASEAN-China Strategic Partnership.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to His Excellency Mr. Wang Yi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of China, for honouring us with his presence today.

Minister Wang Yi, your participation not only underlines the importance that China attaches to ASEAN-China partnership but also reflects the strong relationship between China and Thailand.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Since 1991 ASEAN and China Dialogue Relations has developed into a robust, action-oriented and diversified cooperation based on friendship, mutual trust and confidence.

Much of this was due to the elevation of our relations ten years ago, on 8 October 2003 to be precise. Then the Leaders of ASEAN and China signed the Joint Declaration on Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity. That very same day China also acceded to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia or TAC.

These two landmark events served as a catalyst to the wide ranging issues covered in ASEAN-China relations we see today. We are actively engaged in areas such as political and security, trade and investment, tourism, education, finance and science and technology.

So I believe it is a good opportunity for us to review the state of our strategic partnership.

The focus of this Forum is to take stock of past achievements as well as opportunities and challenges in further enhancing our strategic partnership. We are also here to explore future directions of this partnership, especially in contributing to new regional architecture and community building efforts.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

For the past twenty years, we have seen the steady rise of China. At the same time we have also witnessed the transformation of ASEAN, both as a community and as individual member states.

This growth convergence coincides with the world economy shifting eastwards to the Asia-Pacific region. It has led to new and promising economic opportunities.

The ASEAN-China FTA was the first free trade agreement ASEAN signed with a Dialogue Partner. Today, ASEAN and China are the most active supporters of the push towards a Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership in the greater Asia-Pacific region.

Currently, China is ASEAN's largest trading partner. In 2012, China invested over 4 billion US dollars in cumulative direct investment in our region, and ASEAN's trade with China totals over 300 billion US dollars. I am confident that our bilateral trade will reach the target of 500 billion US dollars as envisaged by our Leaders by 2015.

The close economic cooperation between China and ASEAN has no doubt contributed to regional peace and stability. This is essential if we are to fulfill the popular expectations that the Asia-Pacific region will be the main engine of growth in this Asian century.

But, **Ladies and Gentlemen**, we are not immune from emerging uncertainties.

Today we are seeing new and non-traditional security challenges arising in the region. Against the backdrop of shifting strategic relationships, it is important for us to maintain peaceful external relations.

Thailand is therefore fully aware that we have assumed the role of country coordinator for ASEAN-China Dialogue Relations at a challenging time.

How we address the challenges that lie ahead will depend on how we handle the changing character and dynamics of the relationships in the region. We can no longer conduct our relations based on old assumptions.

China has now emerged as a global player. And the world has high expectations about the role and responsibility of China. Thailand therefore welcomes the expressed commitment of the Chinese leadership that China will assume a greater role and responsibility.

Like many longstanding relationships, as the ASEAN-China partnership advances and matures there will be times when we may have differences.

How we deal with these sensitive issues will be a test of our resolve. We must be able to manage our differences through dialogue and cooperation. Mutual trust and confidence is key.

On South China Sea, we should not let this one issue be a barometer of ASEAN-China relations. We have a common responsibility to ensure that this would not be the case.

We need to transform the area from a sea of uncertainty and mistrust into a sea of shared interests and cooperation. We need to think, not in terms of “maritime claims”, but in terms of “maritime cooperation” and “maritime connectivity”, and enhancing shared interests.

It is therefore important for both ASEAN and China to focus on our mutual interest and work together to contribute to regional peace and stability.

In this context, we are very pleased that ASEAN and China have agreed to start official consultations at the senior officials’ level this September aimed at developing a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea.

This step we are taking is a measure of our mature partnership in managing our differences amicably as members of one big family would do.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

As ASEAN advances toward becoming a Community, we appreciate China’s constructive role in supporting ASEAN community building efforts.

We especially appreciate China’s new initiative to set up a financing platform for regional infrastructure development. Transportation linkages between ASEAN and China are indeed very important.

Why? Because we believe transport linkages connect the dots of opportunities.

For ASEAN, a better connected ASEAN means a more integrated ASEAN Community and contributes to greater inter-regional connectivity.

In this context, we should explore how we can better mobilize resources, encourage private sector participation, and streamline our efforts in order to achieve optimal outcomes.

More important than these hard infrastructures, we need to develop a strategy of increasing “the connection” between ASEAN and China in terms of soft infrastructure as well.

We should look at innovative ways to enhance institutional and people-to-people linkages between ASEAN and China.

For every billion dollar increase in trade volume, we need a corresponding increase in ASEAN-China cultural exchanges and understanding, people-to-people connections, educational linkages and technical cooperation.

Through such efforts, we hope to see our peoples share common goals, values and understanding on the many important issues of mutual interests.

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

As we progress into the second decade of our strategic partnership, it is important for us to do so with mutual trust and confidence, based on our successful cooperation in all areas.

Building on the firm foundation forged over the years, we should seek to develop the strategic partnership for the 21<sup>st</sup> century that will be more comprehensive, more relevant, and more responsive to the needs of the region.

It is equally important that we build upon common grounds and work together to transform our region into one of accelerated cooperation and enhanced prosperity.

As an anchor of regional peace, stability and prosperity, we need to ensure that the ASEAN-China strategic partnership will continue to be strong.

I would like to close with a saying that goes “heads in the clouds, feet on the ground.” Our vision can only be realized through hard work and persistence. We must keep moving forward.

With this, I wish you all a fruitful and successful forum.

Thank you and Sawasdee krub.