

## Sustaining the Planet for our Future Generations

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In the digital age and present context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), we often hear about “big data” and the “Internet of Things (IOT),” which to some, may sound highly technical and virtually digital. While Thailand is fully aware of the opportunities and challenges that come with modernity, we also seek an all-encompassing human dimension of inclusive development, particularly during our year as ASEAN Chair. This is why we came up with the theme “Advancing Partnership for Sustainability,” to promote the “Sustainability of Things (SOT),” which means sustainability in all dimensions.

Sustainable development is an overarching concept that is directly related to SOT. However, the first aspect of sustainability that usually comes to mind of the public is environmental sustainability, which is a significant component of the concept and part of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development or SDGs. These 17 SDGs are simply grouped into 5Ps with the ultimate goal to save the **planet**, foster **peace**, create **prosperity**, enhance **partnership**, and nourish our **people**.

With regard to the ‘planet,’ fresh air and clean water are among the basic yet fundamental essentials for human beings and all other creatures that share this world with us. Sadly, Mother Earth has been harmed and taken for granted by humans more than anyone else throughout history. The fact that several SDGs give importance to the rehabilitation and conservation of our planet reflects the rising environmental concerns and the call for a more balanced development, widely known as the concept of ‘circular economy,’ which is gaining ground globally.

Thailand recognises that enhancing environmental sustainability is inextricably linked to social and economic development, and is one of the key conditions for sustainable development. We have therefore adopted measures to conserve, restore, and manage our natural resources and environment in a more sustainable manner, and included these elements in our 20-Year National Strategy Framework (2017 - 2036).

For instance, Thailand has launched the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) Roadmap on Mitigation (2021 - 2030) to ensure that we meet our targets on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 20 to 25 % by 2030. Some progress has been made so far. Last year, we managed to reduce the emission of 45.72 million tonnes of carbon dioxide or 12% of the targeted 7 - 20% by 2020. Moreover, about 24 hectares of coral reefs and 880 hectares of

mangrove forest were rehabilitated, and the use of over 435 million plastic bags was reduced since 2017.

Beyond our national undertaking, Thailand has consistently advocated cooperation on environmental issues with the global community to derive the long-term benefits. An example is our firm commitment to the Paris Agreement to address climate change. At the same time, Thailand has been cooperating with all partners on the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and best practices.

Sustainable development is a global agenda that requires concerted efforts, and Thailand is in the position to drive it forward this year. In addition to being ASEAN Chair, Thailand is also ASEAN Coordinator on Sustainable Development Cooperation, actively identifying the complementarities and promoting closer coordination between ASEAN and the United Nations. One substantial outcome is the “Complementarities between the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: A Framework for Action” which identifies possible synergy and means to strengthen ASEAN Community-building while attaining several SDGs simultaneously.

A recommendation from the Complementarities Report that will be realized fully this year is the establishment of the ASEAN Centre for Sustainable Development Studies and Dialogue in Thailand. The Centre will be funded by the Royal Thai Government and will help coordinate activities and projects related to the Complementarities Initiative, while linking up with similar centres in ASEAN Member States to form a network of centres in support of regional sustainable development efforts.

During its ASEAN Chairmanship, one of the sustainable development agendas that will be addressed is marine environment. Thailand is greatly concerned with the problem of marine debris and its impact on the environment. We truly believe that urgent action is needed. Researchers have found a marine debris or “garbage patch” in the middle of the Pacific Ocean with a size larger than Bangkok. This debris is eaten by fish, which is then consumed by humans, thus causing severe health problems. News reports of sea animals like whales and turtles suffering from eating indigestible waste are only a fraction of the annual 100,000 deaths of marine animals due to this problem. In addition, marine debris affects the promotion of environmentally friendly tourism and thus affects the contribution of the tourism sector to national development.

A research by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of Thailand found that rubbish that is thrown into the sea can travel all over the world. It is therefore imperative that we have a platform for discussions and collaboration to tackle the problem. A technical working group meeting among

ASEAN members was held in November 2017 while the Special ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Marine Debris and ASEM High-level Meeting on Marine Sustainability will be held on 5 March 2019 and 7 - 8 March 2019, respectively. Thus, Thailand is advancing partnership for sustainability by starting with environmental sustainability, and will expand to other areas throughout the year.

The benefits of sustainable development are countless but each country should embark on its own path and determination to achieve the goals. In Thailand's case, the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) was adopted as its home-grown approach. This philosophy, conferred by His Majesty the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej, proposes a "thinking process" consisting of three parts - analysis on the cause of the problem, identification of practical solutions, and the implementation of the selected solutions.

SEP is mainstreamed in Thailand's policy both at the national and international levels. It has been a guiding principle in Thailand's National Economic and Social Development Plans since 2002 and its application to achieve sustainable development. Thailand has shared this philosophy with many countries as an alternative approach to achieving SDGs through the provision of training courses and the establishment of several cooperation projects in Asia and Africa.

In conclusion, Thailand's commitment towards sustainable development is steadfast as demonstrated in our past achievements and contributions nationally and internationally. We are committed to do more. The agenda will be particularly important during our ASEAN Chairmanship and Thailand looks forward to working with colleagues in ASEAN and beyond in a global partnership as set forth in SDG Goal 17.

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