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Country Policy Statement by His Excellency Dr. Sorajak Kasemsuvan, Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs of Thailand, at the Sixtieth Commission Session of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 26 April 2004, Shanghai, People's Republic of China

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

In 1947, it was here in Shanghai where we, in Asia pledged a collective commitment under the UN umbrella, and I quote, to “promote social progress and better standard of life in larger freedom”. ECAFE or the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East was established to implement our aspiration. Later, the Economic and Social Commission for the Asia and the Pacific or ESCAP, the ECAFE’s successor, became the proud testimony of our collective efforts under the United Nations to bring about that social progress and better standard of life.

Today we come back to our birthplace to commemorate the 60th session of the Commission. In Chinese as well as in Thai and other Asian belief, the 60th anniversary marks a very important milestone in life. So will this 60th session of ESCAP, held in this glorious city of Shanghai. Under Your Excellency’s able guidance and leadership, this session of the Commission will be recorded as an important milestone to prepare all of us in the ESCAP family to meet new global challenges with greater strength and vigor.

This year’s theme of the Commission session recognizes the importance of regional cooperation in managing globalization. Regional cooperation is a key to combating poverty and addressing emerging social issues within this region. In this spirit, the Shanghai Declaration will add political commitment towards developing a regional approach to promoting effective cooperation in the era of globalization.

We must ensure through an integrated regional approach that there shall be no dark side of globalization. Globalization is human-made. So it is human who must manage and steer globalization in the direction for the best benefits of humankind. That direction is already clearly marked. It is no other than the UN Millennium Development Goals or MDGs, our blueprint for sustainable development.

This is indeed what Thailand believes. The Thai Government is making every effort, both unilaterally and multilaterally, not only in striving towards the MDGs targets, but looking beyond the MDGs through “MDGs Plus” indicators. The Prime Minister of Thailand has set, as a priority on the national agenda, the Government’s commitment to eradicate poverty by the year 2009. The first three years of our work have yielded such a considerable progress that even some of our earlier critics became advocates of the year 2009 target.

Mr. Chairman,

It is in a forum like this where I believe nations can share development experiences and best practices to bring hope and inspiration with each other.

Truly convinced in the force of regional cooperation, and guided by the principle of combining partnership strength from diversity, Thailand has initiated the Asia Cooperation Dialogue or ACD, now in its third year and already comprising 22 Asian members from East to West and North to South of Asia. The ACD has achieved

progress in various cooperative programmes for promoting mutual prosperity and sustainable development. This June, the third ACD Ministerial Meeting will be held in Qingdao, China, where we will discuss membership expansion and increase participation in the 18 areas of functional cooperation.

Indeed, Asia-wide cooperation is being reinforced by intra and inter sub-regional partnerships. The Southeast Asian and South Asian economic development has been linked by the recent free trade agreement signed between Myanmar and Thailand on one side, and Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, with Bangladesh later this year, on the other, all within the framework of BIMST-EC cooperation.

Within Southeast Asia, Thailand adheres to the policy of “Prosper thy neighbor”. We do not believe that development and prosperity are what a nation can do it all alone, leaving its adjacent neighbors lagging far behind. This inspired the present Thai Government to launch the ACMECS cooperation, initially with our adjacent neighbors, Myanmar, Lao PDR and Cambodia, and now with Vietnam joining. ACMECS will generate employment and income based on comparative advantage amongst our neighbors. Although it has been launched for just barely 9 months, ACMECS already comprises over 40 common development projects some two hundreds bilateral projects between each pair of its members. Thailand has sought partnership with several interested donor countries to take part in many of these projects. Thailand has also decided to apply for a Dialogue Partner status of the Pacific Islands Forum or PIF. We believe that our participation in this Forum will serve to forge close partnership and cooperation with the Pacific community.

Mr. Chairman,

In this fast-moving world faced with impacts of globalization, sustainable regional development require mobility, access to communication and access to capital. Transportation linkages, information technology, and financing for development are keys.

Thailand shares and commends ESCAP’s commitment to develop sustainable intermodal transport systems that deliver more efficient domestic transport services, while at the same time providing access to international markets and wider hinterlands. Well-positioned as a possible regional hub for land, air and sea transportation, Thailand is currently strengthening the infrastructure and facilities to provide the best available channel of linkages between our peoples and economies in the region. In this regard, we continue to support and facilitate the establishment of the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway networks and intermodal transport.

No-one can deny the indispensable role of information and communication technology or ICT in narrowing the development gap and in facilitating the integration of developing countries into the global economy. The Thai government has launched several ICT projects to narrow the digital divide and uplift the grassroots economies to stand firm in the global economy. In line with the World Summit on the Information Society, higher quality of and wider access to ICT in Thailand does not only improve the knowledge and wisdom, and skill and ability, it also improves the economic and social capability of the people as a whole. Our e-commerce strategy is envisaged to build up the supply side and export capacity of our SMEs, our local economies, our education and public health systems as an integral part of poverty alleviation programmes.

It is apparent that financial markets in Asia and the Pacific are unevenly developed. Access to capital for the grassroots and for financing the SMEs, which are increasingly playing a prominent role in our regional economy, remain scarce in several areas. Besides, foreign reserves savings in our region, totaling over half of the world’s aggregate often end up being deposited and creating wealth elsewhere outside our region. The Asia and Pacific region needs a new financial architecture such as the Asian Bond Fund and Asian Bond market to utilize Asian savings for Asian investment and Asian prosperity.

That is why Thailand is taking a pioneering role in promoting the development of an Asian bond market under the ACD framework. We firmly believe that this new financial architecture will not only benefit each Asian country’s development and that of the region as a whole, but it will also enhance the region’s capability to become a stronger partner for other regions as well as contribute to international financial stability.

Mr. Chairman,

ESCAP’s constructive role to support and promote economic and social development through supporting regional and sub-regional cooperation and integration is crucial for the regional healthy and sustainable development. Thailand supports ESCAP’s role as a “regional knowledge center”, where the well-being of its affiliates could be promoted through its advisory services and preventative measures. I encourage ESCAP to undertake trilateral cooperation and partnership with Thailand and to use Thailand as a platform to assist other developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region. In this regard, Thailand intends to vitalize trilateral cooperation and partnership with ESCAP

to provide technical cooperation as well as exchange experiences in development strategies with other developing countries.

ESCAP could also act as a central player in monitoring and building immunity against current and future threats to the region as well as to seize benefits from the process of globalization. This could be achieved by providing technical services to help countries to establish an early warning system for potential threats arising from epidemics, public health, financial volatility and environmental degradation. In particular, I would like to refer to the recent outbreak of avian influenza in Asia, whereby Thailand is aggressively implementing both immediate and long-term measures for the containment and eradication of the disease with the valuable contribution of regional and international cooperation, especially the FAO's prompt support in terms of the Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP). The programme can be a catalyst for international organizations such as ESCAP and their member states to join forces in eradicating all highly contagious diseases.

Mr. Chairman,

ESCAP's role in balancing the opportunities and challenges of globalization for the economic and social well-being of the peoples of the region is indispensable. Thailand is ready to work with ESCAP and its members in carrying out the spirit of the Shanghai Declaration for mutual prosperity.

Thailand looks forward to welcoming you back in Bangkok for the 61st session of the Commission.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

3 May 2004