

Presentation on the Senate of Thailand
by Mrs. Suvimol Phumisingharaj,
Secretary General of the Senate of Thailand
Dr. Hafnaoui Amrani, President of ASGP,
and distinguished members of ASGP,

On behalf of the host Parliament of ASGP Spring Meeting, it is a great honour and pleasure of the Secretariat of the Senate and the Secretariat of the House of Representatives to welcome all of you. This is the third time of the Thai Parliament to host the IPU Conference and the ASGP Meeting, the first time was in 1956 and the second time was in 1987. For me, it is the last time to do this important and honourable work as I am going to retire from the office of Secretary General of the Senate in the coming September.

Dear Colleagues, I do hope that your stay in our country will be pleasant and comfortable. If there is anything that our Secretariat staff and I can do for you, please do not hesitate to let us know and we will do our best.

For reference and information, we have prepared for you the booklet, brochure as well as DVD entitled “The Thai Senate”. You can pick them at the documentary desk in front of this room. Anyway you may wish to know the goings-on in the Senate through the Senate website: www.senate.go.th.

Now, please pay your attention to the multimedia presentation on the Thai Senate which will take about 10 minutes. Thank you very much. Sawasdee Ka.

DVD Script

Thailand changed its political system from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy in 1932. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Siam 1932 established the first House of Representatives. This house was comprised of members from two categories. Category one was selected by indirect election, category two by appointment. The new constitution which continued unchanged until 1946, created the House of Representatives and the Prudhi Sapha. The Prudhi Sapha was selected by indirect election and mirrored the duties of the Category two members of the House of Representatives. It acted as a house of review and scrutiny for the overall work of the House of Representatives. Thailand briefly had a new constitution in 1946, but this lasted for only a year before repeal. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand (Provisional) 1947 was then enacted. The new constitution re-named the Prudhi Sapha, the Senate. Senators were selected by appointment, and supported the work of the House of Representatives.

The Senate gradually developed in accordance with the powers, duties and context of each stipulated constitution until a new constitution in 1997 brought great changes. New powers were given to the Senate and instead of appointment, its members were to be selected by direct general election. The new Senate was charged with three main duties. The first was to act as a house of review and scrutiny. The second was to select and approve people to hold positions in the organs under the Constitution. The third was to remove any person found to have breached constitutional rules. These 1997 changes to the composition and remit of the Senate represent a milestone in the history of the institution. The 1997 Constitution was repealed in 2006. A new constitution was drafted and then, for the first time in Thailand, a referendum was organized to seek public approval for the draft constitution.

On the 24th of August 2007, the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand (2007) came into operation. In common with previous versions, the new constitution seeks to provide, the political framework for a democratic government, in a parliamentary democracy. It stipulates that the democratic regime of Thailand will be comprised of two elements, those being the House of Representatives, and the Senate. The Constitution states that the Senate shall have 150 members. The members are selected by two methods. The senators are either chosen by elections in each province or are selected for their positions. The nominations for senator are made by academic institutions, the public sector, the private sector, professional organizations and other sectors. The Senate benefits from the range of experience and knowledge that these members bring. Senators must be at least 40 years old and hold at least a bachelor's degree or its equivalent. A senator serves a six year term. When senators are selected, they must make a full disclosure of their assets and liabilities to the National Counter Corruption Commission. The Commission must receive details of the senator's accounts and those of any spouse or other dependents. A full disclosure must also be made to the Commission by the senator when leaving office. However, at the initial period, senators obtained from the selection basis according to the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand 2007 shall hold office for a term of three years. Following this initial three year term, senators will have the right to apply for re-selection.

In terms of powers, duties and responsibilities, the Senate of the 2007 Constitution does not differ greatly from the Senate of the previous 1997 Constitution. As before, the remit of the new Senate includes the scrutiny of bills, control of administrative affairs, the approval of various important issues concerning the interest of State, and the approval of persons to hold positions as provided for by the Constitution. It also has a power to remove persons from office.

The Royal decree on Emolument and other benefits (1992) sets out the financial rules and regulations for senators. The decree seeks to provide senators with the financial support to perform their duties effectively. The Secretariat of the Senate is the body created to assist the work of the Senate. The Secretariat acts as a supporting agency for the Senate, to respond to its demands and ensure the highest standards of public service are maintained.

The Secretariat of the Senate is subordinate to the Senate and has the status of a department. It takes charge of the academic and secretarial work of the Senate. The principal task of the Secretariat is to underpin, support and strengthen Thailand's constitutional monarchy, with the King as Head of State. The Secretariat conducts both the research for and later the analysis of Senate legislation. It also functions to aid co-ordination between government agencies and liaison with private sector organizations.

The Secretariat of the Senate has striven to adapt and adjust its organization in order to fulfill its mission:

“... to enable the Senate to efficiently perform its duties, in accordance with the constitution, for the utmost public benefit, and to become, one of the core institutions for the democratic development of the country.”