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THE KINGDOM OF THAILAND
COUNTRY REPORT

Theme : Development and Environment

By : The Honorable Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tassana Boontong
Vice-President of the Senate of Thailand
Leader of the Thai Delegation to the 41st General Assembly
of the Asian-Pacific Parliamentarians' Union

Country Report by
Honorable Associate Professor Dr. Tassana BOONTONG
Vice-President of the Senate of Thailand
Leader of the Thai Delegation to the 41st General
Assembly of the Asian-Pacific Parliamentarians' Union
10 August 2010, Tokyo, Japan

Honorable Chairperson,
Fellow Parliamentarians,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, on behalf of the National Assembly of the Kingdom of Thailand, it is an honor for me to speak before this gathering of parliamentarians attending the 41st General Assembly of the Asia-Pacific Parliamentarians' Union here in Tokyo. Secondly, this is an opportunity for me to share my views with all of you on the current political, economic and environmental situation in the region and in the world under the General Assembly's theme of Development and Environment. Thirdly, I am touched by the warm hospitality which our host has accorded to me and my delegation since our arrival in Japan. And lastly, I am earnestly looking forward to a productive Assembly and a renewal of the longstanding friendship and cooperation within our APPU family.

Honorable Chairperson,

Please allow me to report to you that the Thai National Assembly had hosted a highly successful 122nd Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union from 27 March to 1 April 2010 in Bangkok. It was one of the largest Assembly in recent

history of the Inter-Parliamentary Union which brought together 1,248 delegates from the parliaments of 135 countries, of-which 621 were members of national parliament and included 36 presiding officers, 47 deputy presiding officers and 178 women which women comprises 28.7% of the total participants at the Bangkok Assembly. Among the presiding officers and deputy presiding officers who were in Bangkok on that occasion were from Japan, Republic of Korea, Republic of Palau, and Samoa. I am wholeheartedly gratified for those high-level presence and the support from parliaments in the Asia-Pacific region for the successful organization of the 122nd Inter-Parliamentary Assembly.

As you may well know, the Inter-Parliamentary Union has a primary goal of promoting the status of women in politics and development in decision-making and governance. During the 122nd Assembly, I had the honor of chairing the 15th Meeting of Women Parliamentarians which had deliberated multi-faceted issues concerning women and gender partnership and had innovated plans of actions to strengthen the role of women in these fields and to consolidate their places in governmental leadership. I regarded my parliamentary service at the women's meeting in Bangkok as an honor for all women parliamentarians from the Asia-Pacific region and I am proud that our sisters from the region had represented our region remarkably at that meeting which had made my job as the chairperson of the meeting easier and simpler and they had constructively contributed to gender empowerment. As the chairperson of the 15th Meeting of Women Parliamentarians, I wish to call your attention to the Bangkok Declaration on Stopping All Forms of Violence Against Women which received a consensus in Bangkok. I sincerely hope that the APPU would support this Declaration

and the national parliaments of APPU member countries would ensure its implementation.

Honorable Chairperson,

The political crisis which has recently taken place in Thailand was another challenging phase of our democratization. Still, despite all the missteps, all the stops and starts, Thailand has always returned to the path of democracy. And after every ordeal, democracy has always reemerged stronger and more representative in Thailand. We firmly believe that only the democratic system will lead us to sustainable development and that it will deliver peace and prosperity to the Thai people. We certainly need a kind of democracy that is based upon the rule of law, responsibility, accountability, equal treatment and reconciliation with those with opposing views. There is no question how much Thailand values democracy and how much Thailand commits itself to the world of democracy. We have learned the hard way on how to build a democratic rule and how tough it is to do so. I believe that our democratic experiences are valuable to countries who are in pursuits of democracy. Especially as democracies in many parts of the world are not perfect and are struggling to determine how young democracies could be developed and consolidated without triggering instability. As democracy is a founding goal of the APPU, I wish to call upon the APPU to avail itself, and build upon its strong democracies, to democratic development in the region and consolidation of regional democracy.

On the regional front, the years long political crises in Thailand do not stand in the way for us to work alongside our partners in ASEAN under the ASEAN Charter to establish an ASEAN Community by 2015. The ASEAN Community is a

regional milestone and it is in the interests of the APPU to support its creation. Because an ASEAN Community would bring regional stability to the Asia-Pacific region and every significant force in ASEAN including its national parliaments are fully rallying behind it, and it is in combination with the relevant regional architectures namely, the ASEAN Regional Forum which is the principal forum for security dialogue in Asia and has a bearing on the security of the Asia Pacific region, and the East Asia Summit which is a forum held annually by leaders of 16 countries in the East Asian region. The ASEAN Charter was founded on three pillars, political development and security, economic prosperity and identity, and social cohesion and harmony which are the very important foundation for global security and worldwide prosperity and its continued success was dependent on support from countries outside the region being maintained. For these reasons, I see the benefits from the evolving ASEAN to our two organizations by sharing their experiences in regional affairs together since ASEAN pursued economic prosperity but also counted among its priorities the development and consolidation of democracy, the protection of human rights and the creation of equitable and inclusive societies.

Turning to the economy, every region in the world all faces several challenges to human security which are at the top of their economic and social well-beings. Following the Asian financial crisis, Asian economies had learned not to borrow in foreign currencies. Asia had accumulated foreign reserves and was determined not to slip back into crisis, but international trade linkages meant that the recent financial turbulence had affected all economies. The statistical recession might be over but the human recession was not, because unemployment was still climbing and meeting the Millennium Developments Goals are still the daunting tasks in many regions. Wages in

poor countries were falling as commodity prices dropped and they are partly hampering world efforts at poverty eradication. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the G20, amongst the international organizations and global policy-makers, are looking to create greater international financial discipline in the face of multilateral resistance to the enforcement of regulations. Despite Asia's generally strong economic and financial outlook and unless that resistance was overcome and the Greek financial crisis has bottomed out, the financial crisis would return.

Regarding human recession and social security, parliamentarians are at the heart of governance and social transformation. Although in 2009 and so far in 2010 much energy and time had been spent dealing with climate change and the financial crisis, HIV/AIDS and newly emerging pandemic diseases as well as child survival and maternal health remained vital issues globally and which called for a sound global social safety net. The epidemic had been accompanied by growing inequality between the rich and the poor. An appeal was made to the 122nd Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union to remove the barriers to medical and social services in the developing world and women's stark choices of choosing between food and treatment and between education for their children and treatment for grave diseases. Parliaments and the entire world should not accept such inequality just because the financial crisis and economic disparities are still influencing the world today.

Honorable Chairperson,

In the current world situation, every country faces global challenges arising from industrial development, urbanization and over consumption which bring negative impacts to the

environment. Global warming and climate change are harming the environments all of the world and threatening the lives of millions of people in every region and particularly those in the least developed countries in Asia and Africa. These two issues are especially felt in the Pacific island nations and no other challenge in the Pacific is as urgent and potentially life-threatening as climate change where it is well-known throughout the world that some countries in the Pacific who are the major members of the APPU are facing undiminishing rising sea levels which may sink some island countries if the alarming environmental situation there goes unabated. These life and death issues are dominating the world's critical mass and are determining the regional and global agendas on development and environment since they are phenomenal to global economy, political stability, and human security.

Like all countries in the world, global warming and climate change are significantly affecting Thailand. We are now facing severe droughts, water shortages and floods annually resulting from deforestation, industrialization, urban development, unseasonal monsoons, drastic changes of weather patterns, and consumption habits and lifestyles which are degrading our environment and livelihood at fast paces year by year. Our coastlines and waterfronts are eroding each year from climate change, high tides and rising sea levels, and our rainy seasons are much more fierceful than in the past. We had introduced various infrastructural measures and holistic approaches to contain and combat the severities from these environmental damages. We are also parties to several international conventions dealing with environmental issues and we are trying our best to implement them to the full. We advocated alternative energy and renewable energy as our new sources for energy supply and consumption. These new energy alternatives which are increasingly based on clean technology

and sustainable development also include nationwide consumption of agro-fuels and organic food and environmental friendly lifestyles. On top of these tendencies for sustainable development and environmental protection, Thailand had introduced His Majesty the King's sufficiency economy which advocates a principle of development and managed harms to environment and the empowerment of the people to enhance their human security in living in the world of globalization. We believe that we could better our lives through this royal principle for development.

Honorable Chairperson,

The theme for the 41st APPU Assembly which is sustainable development and environment is a timely decision of the host and reflects the real issues confronting us all in this region which I had spoken at length in the early part of my country report and as we are all living in and are being influenced by globalization. These two global issues have always been and continued to receive continuous attention from parliaments all over the world and at every regional and global inter-parliamentary fora. By doing so, parliaments have been debating the known causes and effects of unsustainable development upon the environmental conditions around us and have come up with inexhaustive plans of actions to rectify these human threatening problems. The lists are never conclusive. And what seem to be lacking from parliaments around the world are the commitments to address sustainable development and environment, and specifically climate change and global warming, that are politically, operationally and legally binding, and the coherence among national and international agencies and actors to implement measures and to respond to accountability for sustainable development and environmental protection provided by democracy and good

governance despite the best international agreements and global policies and necessary resources.

Naturally countries do have differences and parliaments and the executive branch have different responsibilities, and we all accept these, but that should not in any way impede us from determining a way forward and a better way forward. It is important therefore that parliaments together with the regional and global inter-parliamentary organizations must undertake a major role and through the parliamentary oversights in strengthening cooperation between parliaments, the governments and the United Nations in the traditional and newly-emerging areas of development and environment. It is particularly essential for parliaments worldwide to understand the delicate balance between the healths of certain areas of development and environment such as water and ocean, and their use and to strike a balance between sustainable practice and the health of the environment. It is equally important that parliaments raise constituent awareness to highlight the need to combat environmental effects from unsustainable development, underscore the importance of renewable energy resources, and draw attention to new and clean technologies for development and consumption.

Thus, the 38th APPU General Assembly in Taiwan in 2009 had resolved to establish three working groups on issues of regional significance to the Asia-Pacific region which were proposed by the Thai National Assembly, namely the APPU working group on ecotourism, the APPU working group on sustainable water resources, and the APPU working group on alternative clean energy. In these regards, the Thai National Assembly had designated Dr. Kobkul Phanchaoenworakul as the focal point for ecotourism, Dr. Jetn Sirathranont as the focal point for sustainable water resources, and Mr. Ong-Art

Klampaiboon as the focal point for alternative clean energy. Having said these, I am happy to announce to all of you that Thailand is going to host the first meeting of the working group on ecotourism from 24-27 September 2010 in Phuket, and I would like to take this opportunity to invite the APPU member countries to attend this meeting. The formal invitations will be sent directly to your parliaments soonest. I wish also to strongly encourage the other APPU member countries to move in this similar way to appoint your focal points for the three working groups in order to facilitate discussions among us on these key issues of sustainable development and environment and to consider convening the remaining working groups in due time.

Honorable Chairperson,

Fellow Parliamentarians,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Having shared my thoughts and ideas with you this morning, I sincerely wish that you would render your resolves to apply them in putting forward the proposals from this General Assembly which benefit us all. And I avail myself to working with you for the successful outcomes of the 41st General Assembly.

Thank you for your attention.
