

Statement by Hon Mr. Alongkorn Ponlaboot, MP
Pushing Forward the WTO Doha Round of Negotiations, and Promoting Asia-Europe
Trade and Investment
At the Fifth Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership Meeting
19 June 2008, Beijing, Peoples' Republic of China

Mr. Chairman,
Dear Colleagues,

In this period of increased financial uncertainty, soaring commodity prices, a severe worsening economic climate and the eroding confidence levels in the world economy, a combination of openness and the international and domestic rules-based trading system of the WTO provides a hugely important source of economic stability, transparency and legal certainty for governments, business and consumers. Henceforth, in the current circumstances, counting on the WTO and on concluding the Doha Round is the nearest available message of confidence we can send to the global community and the people we represent.

Thailand is fully committed to the conclusion of the Doha Development Round. Thailand supports the modalities of negotiations to balance the agricultural and industrial components and we are earnestly monitoring the progress of the senior officials meeting now underway in Geneva which we hope would lead to a much-awaited ministerial conference in June and an early conclusion of the Round. Thailand looks beyond agricultural and industrial tariffs to advance negotiations in areas such as services, investments and trade facilitation as well as Aids for Trade.

The Doha Round is critically meant to be a Development Round for all developing countries – whether they be importing or exporting nations. Since farmers in those countries in as much as their counterparts in developed countries earn their living from the sale of farm produce, their development needs require that market be opened for their exports. Hence, we need countries to recognize this need as part of the development round. In view of the fact that there is a large gap between the applied and bound rates existing in the majority of importing countries, a tariff cut on the basis of the formula, should have no adverse effect on anyone at all. In addition, given the current tight supply of certain staple food such as rice in certain parts of the world, would it not be a wise solution to reduce tariff in order to make them available at cheaper prices, particularly in view of the unacceptable fact that 862 million people are still undernourished in the world today.

Obviously, the challenges of bioenergy and climate change, and the current situation of soaring food prices is having adverse impacts on food security, particularly in developing countries and countries in transition, all the more because the indications are that food prices will remain high in the years to come. The current situation has highlighted the fragility of the world's food systems and their vulnerability to shocks. It is essential to address the fundamental question of how to increase the resilience of present food production systems to free people from hunger and to challenges posed by climate change. The Doha Round can be part of the answer to the food crisis. Asia and Europe can contribute their part through the ASEM Investment Promotion Action Plan (IPAP) and the Hanoi Declaration on Closer ASEM Economic Partnership to respond to the calls by the High-Level Conference on World Food Security in Rome on 3 June, to provide urgent assistance to affected countries and to reinforce their production and trade capacities.

The world must also address the challenges and opportunities posed by biofuels, in view of the world's food security, energy and sustainable development needs. In-depth studies of biofuels and exchanges of experiences on biofuels technologies, norms and regulations are necessary to ensure their production and utilization is sustainable in accordance with sustainable development and takes into account the need to achieve and maintain global food security. Equally necessary is a clear boundary to grow food crops and biofuel crops as a part of agricultural reform.

Parliaments around the world play direct roles in trade and development. Thailand looks forward to a successful parliamentary conference on WTO, to be co-hosted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the European Parliament, in September in Geneva to offer parliamentary dimension for a successful conclusion of the Doha Round and for easing the global food and fuel crises.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.