

Speech

Hon. Trungjai Buranasomphob

On behalf of the Thai parliamentary delegation

at the 5th ASEP Meeting

First of All, on behalf of the Thai National Assembly delegation to the fifth Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership Meeting, I would like to express my sincere condolences to the People's Republic of China for the tragedy May 12 earthquake that hit southwest China followed by many strong aftershocks, as well as the recent big deluge. Please convey our deepest sorrow and sympathy to the victims of the both aforesaid tragedies and their families. The Chinese government's rapid and effective disaster relief is truly praise-worthy.

I also would like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt appreciation to all of you, our European and Asian friendly countries, for your understanding on Thailand's situations during the recent years of our effort to restore our democracy and representative institution. The Thai National Assembly pledges its firm commitment to devote its resources and provide every possible supports to all inter-parliamentary organizations' initiatives.

At the global level, the Millennium Development Goals proclaimed by the United Nations must be continually followed up and regarded by every country as momentous strategic targets for multi-dimensional and sustainable growth as they aim to promote partnership of government and stakeholders and good governance to improve people's access to food, education, healthcare, equality, and environmental sustainability. To make those goals complete, we should lay emphasis not only on our closer but also "better" cooperation. A better cooperation is the cooperation without hatred, prejudices and discrimination. To formulate ways and means for a better cooperation, we cannot ignore the influence of soft power that are powerful force behind the successes and failures of our interactions with others; that is, culture. In

this era of globalization when poverty, inequality and confrontations are the pressing threats to mankind, the trend towards harmonious integration of communities both globally and regionally for mutual interest has gained increased momentum in international relations as evident in various regions and between regions. Conflicts happened here and there, in my point of view, are caused by differences of norms and values. As the people's mindset about norms and values is shaped by culture, essential prerequisites to achieve the aforesaid international harmony are the equal acceptance and respect to all cultures.

We particularly acknowledge with satisfaction "The European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008" initiated by the European Commission, comprising many commendable actions in favour of cultural exchanges. On Thailand's part, the government recently co-hosted with the government of the Netherlands "the fourth ASEM interfaith dialogue" between 3-5 June 2008 in Amsterdam where participants discussed the best practices in the fields of interfaith dialogue and poverty reduction, religious education, communication in the digital world and government policies that show the implementation of the interfaith dialogue's outcomes. Thailand fully supports all the ideas and measures from the Amsterdam meeting. Nevertheless, my further idea is that if we recognize cultural diversity and regard it as an integral part of strength - not a cause for division and discrimination, we will overcome all obstacles to the full potential integration and there will be no impasse for us to resolve problems. I hope that ASEP, as a parallel body of ASEM, will be a strategic platform for us to make multiculturalism our common norm in order that we shall act and advance together in strengthening Asia - Europe partnership from the strength of our diversity. As Thailand is culturally diverse, we attach great importance to and always advocate the broaden enhancement of open interfaith, intercultural and intercivilizational dialogues aiming to bridge the political gap, eradicate hatred and soften confrontation. If we can create a harmony and happy coexistence among countries through tourism promotion and interfaith dialogues, peace, security and prosperity will surely be attained.

In January this year Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, our former Foreign Minister, assumed the post of Secretary-General of ASEAN and in the forthcoming September Mr. Chai Chidchob, our President of the Thai National Assembly will assume the Presidency of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly. There are opportunities be abound for the Thai National Assembly to pursue a closer and concrete cooperation with ASEAN and ASEAN's dialogue partners including the European Union. With Thailand playing a key part in ASEAN's drive to foster partnership with Europe, ASEP and AIPA can henceforth explore this advantage to work together to drive our regions to the greater benefits of our peoples.

I welcome the membership of Romania, Bulgaria, India, Pakistan and Mongolia in ASEM and henceforth their national parliaments as the newest members of ASEP. According to the Chair Statement of the 8th ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting last year, Asia-Europe cooperation in this new enlarged ASEM framework represents around 50% of the world-GDP, approximately 58% of the world population and 60% of world trade. With this stronger leverage, our synergy can make the difference in the world platform.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China for this well-organized and constructive meeting.

Thank you very much.
