

Statement by
H.E. Dr. Surakiart Sathirathai,
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand
at the African Union Extra-ordinary Summit
on Employment and Poverty alleviation in Africa
Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
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Mr. President,

Thailand takes pride of the invitation extended by the Government of Burkina Faso to attend for the first time an African meeting of such high stature and, more importantly, a Summit of the African Union.

Mr. Chairman,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Thailand wishes to congratulate H.E. President Obasanjo of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on his assumption of the Chairmanship of the African Union.

Thailand is gratified to have been invited and attaches much significance to our first participation at this African Union Summit. For the last four years, the present Thai Government has taken new initiatives in Thailand's foreign policy emphasizing on what we call "Forward Engagement" reaching out for partnership for development at all levels of international relations. Thailand deeply appreciates the opportunity to share with friends in the African Union the experiences, successes, failures and best practices on development as well as partnership for development. During the visit of Secretary General Kofi Annan to Thailand in July 2004, the Thai Government submitted to him Thailand's Millennium Development Goal Report, where we were among the first to achieve Goal 8 on "Developing a global partnership for development."

Thailand is fully committed to the spirit of South-South Cooperation. Thailand is fully prescribed to turning the spirit of South-South cooperation into real actions and real outcomes. And Thailand is fully dedicated to meaningful self-help and partnership for development. That is why we believe Asia and Africa can forge a meaningful partnership, learning from each other and helping each other for the betterment of each other's continent. That is why two years ago, Thailand advocated the invitation to H.E. President Mbeki, then the Chairman of the African Union, to address the Leaders of ASEAN or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, on NEPAD in Phnom Pehn, Cambodia during the ASEAN Summit in November 2002. That initiative served as a new momentum for the growing links between ASEAN and Africa as well as ASEAN's involvement in NEPAD.

On our part, in the past few years, Thailand has been honoured to receive a great number of Heads of State and Government, Ministers as well as other dignitaries from so many African countries, including President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni of Uganda, President Ismail Omar Guelleh of Djibouti, President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, President El Hadj Omar Bongo of Gabon, President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal, and President Fetus Mogae of Botswana. Through these visits, and other bilateral meetings between my Prime Minister and other African Heads of State and Government in various occasions such as the NAM Summit and the bilateral meetings with my counterparts from African countries, we have found many areas of partnership with our African friends both on enhancing bilateral relations and in addressing global threats and challenges. And next year will be visit Africa year for the Thai Prime Minister.

Mr. Chairman,

Employment and poverty alleviation are the two inseparable issues. Opportunities create employment. Employment creates income. Adequate income alleviates poverty. If governments can gear the implementation of their policy towards reducing expenses, increasing income and creating more opportunities for their people, in linking employment with poverty alleviation, they can be on the right track to improve the well-being of their people. That is the main policy of the present Thai Government and Thailand commends the far-sightedness of African Leaders in linking poverty eradication with the creation of employment opportunities. This Summit will add further impetus to the African Union's integrated policies in generating employment through promoting intra-African trade and developing local industries and entrepreneurship. They are important strides towards achieving the targets of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGS), as well as those principles set out at the LDC Brussels Conference in April 2002, and the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

Thailand wishes to share some of her experiences in economic recovery and poverty reduction.

Thailand was seriously hit by the financial crisis of 1997. When the present government took office in January 2001, we inherited the legacy of severe economic set-back. But today the Thai economy rests on a secure and solid foundation. Last year, we achieved 6.8 percent GDP growth, second in Asia only to China. Our revised GDP growth for 2004 is at 6-7 percent,

despite the adverse intervening outbreaks of SARS and bird flu as well as the immense impact of rising oil prices. Last year, we paid back all the 12.3 billion US dollars of IMF loans two years ahead of schedule. Notwithstanding that, our foreign reserves continue to stand at the healthy level of over 43.5 billion US dollars, much higher than its peak before the crisis, despite more than 60% devaluation of the currency as the result of the crisis. Our aim is to eliminate poverty as defined by the UN before the end of this decade.

Our success is guided by the principles of self-help and partnership. We pursue what we call the dual-track policy. This dual-track policy builds on local and grassroots strengths in order to create a more equitable distribution of wealth on the one hand, while maintaining the support for export-led sector of the economy, which has long been the traditional growth machine. In strengthening the grassroots economy, we draw inspiration from the philosophy of His Majesty the King of Thailand, known as "Sufficiency Economy", which seeks to achieve sustainable development and better quality of life, particularly for people at the grassroots level, through readily available resources and practical applications of technology. Given the proven success story of "sufficiency economy" philosophy, Thailand hopes to share this experience with fellow developing countries. We will host the **Ministerial International Conference on Alternative Development: Sufficiency Economy** this November. We are inviting several Asian and African countries which have shown interest in this philosophy. Thailand is honoured and looks forward to welcoming all of them.

To stimulate and strengthen the grassroots economy, the Government has also put in place schemes such as a nation-wide village fund, micro-credit facilities, small and medium enterprise (SME) incentive schemes, and the one-village-one-product scheme or what we call OTOP. All of these measures were put together as a package of powerful means to provide access to capital that the grassroots had been deprived of, to develop human resources that had been lacking, to yield extra income that had been hard earned for poor villagers, and to stimulate cottage industries as well as small and medium enterprises.

OTOP is aimed at building upon local ingenuity and wisdom by bringing the unique products of each and every village such as local handicrafts, silverware, nielloware, pottery and weaving fabrics to the marketplaces, both domestic and international. OTOP's guiding principles are to revive community pride while generating income and employment for the poor villagers. After 3 years of its implementation, last year, its sales reached 700 million US dollars. Incidentally, many OTOP villagers have increased their sales and found new local and international markets through the internet. The Government has been successful in introducing ICT to the grassroots in every village. Villagers find ICT both relevant and useful in improving their quality of life, improving their income and reducing poverty.

Mr. Chairman,

Thailand may still be a developing country. Thailand may still have its own domestic economic problems to tackle especially our aim at eradicating poverty by the end of the decade. Thailand may be just a medium size country, populationwise. And Thailand may

seem far away from the African continent. But Thailand has also come far enough in our economic achievements. And for us, we know where our friends are. Nearer or afar, friends in need are always friends indeed. Whenever possible and ready, friends will find love and help in friends. For Thailand we are ready.

Forging partnership with Africa to promote and achieve self-help and sustainable development is what the Thai Government is committed to do. Holding hands to stand and move forward with friends is what the Thai Government has succeeded in our region and is doing so with friends outside the region. Strengthening the South by creating meaningful South-South partnership and bringing in more North-South partnership is what the Thai Government prescribes and encourages all to do so. Thailand has initiated the new economic strategy to close the gap left wide apart by the economic disparity between Thailand and our adjacent neighbours. By bringing in outside partners from developed countries, this economic strategy and partnership with our neighbours will help accelerate the socio-economic integration of South-east Asia.

Besides hundreds of scholarships that have been offered to some 18 African countries, and the existing bilateral technical support programmes, there is a lot more we can do together. Thailand stands ready to enhance our technical cooperation with Africa through bilateral, trilateral and regional frameworks in line with NEPAD and South-South cooperation. We can also identify a number of areas that can contribute to NEPAD's activities such as "food security" and human resources development.

Whilst under the trilateral framework, Thailand offers to become

a partner in the areas we have expertise. In addition to Thailand's participation in TICAD, Thailand is forging cooperation with Japan under JICA and France under French Agency for Development (AFD) and is currently contemplating with the UK in providing technical cooperation and training courses for African personnel. Our endeavours involve partnership with the United Nations such as UNDP, UNFPA, and UNICEF in increasing development cooperation with Africa.

All of these three levels of partnership cover, *inter alia*, agricultural development, food and fruit processing, fish culture, water management and primary healthcare. Indeed, HIV/AIDS is a threat to development in countries around the world. Africa is not alone in its fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In July 2004, Thailand hosted a very successful 15th International AIDS Conference, which encompassed all stakeholders in the fight against HIV/AIDS under the theme "Access for all." We were honoured by the participation of African leaders and dignitaries, whose contribution added impetus to addressing this scourge. Thailand is prepared to extend support and assistance to our friends in Africa to tackle this common challenge. Our collaboration should even extend to providing technical know-how on the manufacturing of affordable anti-retroviral medication.

Human Security is also important if we want to achieve real development for our people. Freedom from fear and freedom from want must strike the right balance. On this

note, as fellow member of the Human Security Network, Thailand wishes to congratulate Mali who has successfully chaired the Network for the year 2003-2004. Thailand looks forward to working closely with Mali and South Africa when we take on the chairmanship for the year 2005-2006.

Threats from landmines are also threats to human security. As President of the Fifth Meeting of the States Parties of the Mine Ban Convention, Thailand is working with Africa in realizing a world free from landmines and to make the upcoming Nairobi Summit a success. In so doing, Thailand will coordinate with the World Bank on resource mobilization for the implementation of the Convention.

Mr. Chairman,

In Asia, we do not have the privilege of sharing the 40 years of experience in continent-wide cooperation as in the case of the Organization of African Unity and now the adoption of the African Union. Asia has had numerous regional, sub-regional, intra sub-regional, and inter-regional cooperation, none of which has been nor could be a link continent wide. That was until June 2002.

Initiated by Thailand in June 2002, the Asia Cooperation Dialogue or ACD was inaugurated to serve as that missing link. Aiming at turning Asian diversity into Asian strength, the ACD now comprises 25 countries from all corners of Asia. More countries have indicated their intention to join. There are as many as 18 functional cooperation projects, ranging from poverty eradication to SME development, and tourism cooperation to the development of an Asian Bond market. As ACD coordinator, Thailand is consulting with ACD partners in establishing an Asia-Africa partnership through ACD-NEPAD linkage. Thailand hopes to be knocking on your doors soon in realizing this partnership.

Mr. Chairman,

Next year marks the Golden Jubilee of the Asian-African Conference of 1955. Upon that auspicious occasion, the Asian-African Summit will be held in Indonesia. This summit will give political impetus to a new Asia-Africa partnership. Preparations for the 2005 Summit have already been launched by the Ministers at the recent Asian-African Sub-regional Organizations Conference (AASROC) in Durban, South Africa. The Ministers agreed to enhance coordination between the sub-regional groupings of SADC in southern Africa and ASEAN in Southeast Asia. Both SADC and ASEAN can establish economic linkages. We can learn from one another's experience in strengthening regional economic integration, particularly in bridging economic disparities within their respective sub-regions. Let us make that Summit a more meaningful partnership.

It is time our two continents made real strides ahead and join hands to move forward to stand firm against any challenges of globalization. It is time our two continents built partnership as friends who can help and see the benefit for each other. It is

time, bilaterally or collectively, we made ourselves heard as one when it comes to bringing peace and prosperity to our respective peoples.

It is time our two continents truly acted as one regardless of races, colours, religions, beliefs or culture for the benefits of our peoples and the mankind. It is time our two continents pulled strength for the common goal of eradicating poverty and sustainable development. This is the time, from this Summit on, where we can see the real achievement of the Millennium Development Goal as a result of South-South partnership.

Thailand stands ready to join hands with Africa as a true friend and partner in accomplishing our common aspirations for our shared destiny.

Thank you very much for your attention.