

Inaugural Address  
by  
His Excellency Dr. Plodprasop Suraswadi,  
Deputy Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand,  
at the Sixty-ninth Session of  
The United Nations Economic and Social Commission  
for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP)  
at the United Nations Conference Centre, Bangkok  
29 May 2012 at 09.00 hours

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Excellencies President, Prime Ministers and Ministers,  
Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations,  
Madam Executive Secretary,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

(Allow me at the outset to express my sincere congratulations to Your Excellency President Thein Sein on the special presentation in recognition of Your Excellency's vision and leadership)

1. It is an honour for me to be here at this important gathering and represent the Prime Minister of Thailand. On behalf of the Royal Thai Government and the people of the Kingdom of Thailand, I would like to extend a very warm welcome and wish you a pleasant stay in Thailand.
2. The Sixty-ninth Session of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP) is particularly an important one. It is the first Commission Session to follow the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) or the Rio+20 Summit held at Rio de Janeiro in June last year.
3. At the Rio+20 Summit, the global community renewed its commitment to sustainable development and to ensure the promotion of economically, socially and environmentally sustainable future for the planet and for present and future generations. It also acknowledged poverty eradication as the greatest global challenge confronting the world today and as an indispensable requirement for sustainable development.
4. The challenges we face today are becoming more intricate and interconnected than ever. Factors such as the advancement of technology and the scope of the modern economic web have brought the individuals of the world much closer to one another.

Enhanced connectivity is certainly most welcomed as it provides immense opportunities and facilitates all-inclusive development. Unfortunately, we must also accept that this interconnectedness has also brought along one of the biggest challenges of the present era. Adversities such as natural disasters and economic crises are also riding this wave of connectivity and interdependence allowing their impacts to proliferate more rapidly and at a greater and unprecedented scale.

5. Regarded as the world's most disaster-prone region, Asia and the Pacific region has been severely and relentlessly pounded in recent years by a series of shocks. Natural disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis, cyclones, floods, droughts and their consequent enormous human losses and economic damages, compounded by other volatilities such as the 2008 economic and financial crisis, soaring food and energy prices, have demonstrated the critical need for the region to adopt new systematic thinking and seek innovative solutions to timely and effectively confront these challenges in a holistic and hands on manner.
6. With the rise of uncertainty in the Asia-Pacific region, the theme of the Sixty-ninth Commission Session, namely, **"Building Resilience to Natural Disasters and Major Economic Crises"** could not come at a better time. In order to withstand, adapt to, and recover from natural and man-made calamity, the concept of resilience needs to be comprehensively and systematically embedded into development strategies at all levels – local, national, regional and global.
7. Building resilience to natural disasters and major economic crises calls for a new paradigm of thinking. The traditional approach of taking on each calamity individually is no longer adequate in dealing with multiple and overlapping shocks that demand more comprehensive, systematic and multi-layered approaches to forming resilience. Communities and governments must adopt this new paradigm with a sense of urgency in order to withstand, adapt to, and recover from calamities that are no longer a distant possibility but a current reality. It is imperative that this new paradigm will be taken further in the deliberation of the post -2015 development agenda.
8. As many of you are aware, Thailand was not without a disaster of its own. Thailand's flood crisis in 2011 caused severe damages to our economy and society. In comparison to natural disasters around the globe, this mega-flood was perhaps ranked the fourth since 2005.
9. For Thailand, this flood crisis provided an important opportunity to re-evaluate and thus introduce a holistic and integrated approach to water management and flood prevention. This includes the establishment of a much needed single command authority to coordinate all water management works which is capable of making prompt decisions while monitoring day-to-day situations and during times of crisis. Moreover, Thailand has dedicated 350 billion Thai Baht or 11.5 billion US Dollars to



- invest in a well-integrated water management infrastructure and flood prevention system to prevent future floods.
10. On this note, Thailand will be hosting the 2<sup>nd</sup> Asia-Pacific Water Summit during 19-20 May 2013 in city of Chiang Mai. At this summit, leaders of the Asia-Pacific region will come together to share views and foster cooperation under the theme "Water Security and Water-Related Disaster Challenges: Leadership and Commitment".
  11. Thailand has been actively supporting regional cooperation on disaster management. In 2005, Thailand contributed 10 million US Dollars to establish the ESCAP Multi-Donor Trust Fund for Tsunami, Disaster and Climate Preparedness in the Indian Ocean and South East Asia Countries. The Trust Fund has strengthened regional capacity and resilience, and promoted South-South and triangular cooperation for multi-hazard risk reduction and related climate change adaptation measures. It is important that the Trust Fund continues to be supported to ensure that it effectively contributes to the goal of ESCAP to achieve inclusive, resilient, and sustainable development in the Asia and the Pacific.

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12. In our views, building resilience in the Asia and the Pacific requires the support of regional groupings such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and other regional organizations as they provide building blocks for the broader strengthening of the resilience agenda. Moreover, it is imperative that the Asia-Pacific region transmits a strong regional voice to integrate disaster risk reduction into the post-2015 development agenda.
13. Another significant prerequisite for resilience is economic growth which can be achieved through economic integration and regional connectivity. Thailand strongly believes that creating regional linkages and integration can play a critical role in promoting sustained economic growth that will be a solid basis for us to enhance resilience and preparedness against unforeseen crises.
14. With this mindset, the Thai Parliament has approved an act to invest 2.2 trillion Baht or approximately 66.7 billion US Dollars in transportation and logistics projects in the country. This includes high speed trains and dual train track development, as well as better road networks linking Greater Mekong Sub-region and ASEAN economic corridors, sea ports and border facilities.
15. These investments are made to ensure Thailand's competitiveness which is one of the four pillars of our long term national strategy. The remaining three strategies are: building the country's growth to be more inclusive, restructuring the economy and

society to become more green, and improving our internal process to ensure a more balanced, resilient, and sustainable growth in the long run.

16. Moreover, these investments will consolidate Thailand's role as the region's connectivity and logistics hub, supplementing the ASEAN Master Plan on Connectivity and the ESCAP's "Asian Highway" and the "Trans-Asian Railway".

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17. The interconnectedness of the present era presents vast opportunities and should be embraced and further enhanced, particularly for inclusive sustainable development and building resilience in the Asia-Pacific region. However, the challenge lies in how we must deal with the other side of the same coin which has made us much more susceptible to natural disasters and economic crises. The challenges we face demand that we see the world and its problems in a new light, and more importantly, that we continue to take action.
18. I am therefore especially pleased to be here today amongst all of you in a venue that has been a place of deliberation and action for over the past 64 years. I hope that Member States of Asia and the Pacific will continue this tradition and spirit of cooperation to safeguard our past efforts and developmental gains so that they will no longer be lost due to natural disasters and economic crises, and to ensure sustainable growth, prosperity and stability of our region in the interests of all.
19. Thailand is resolute in furthering and strengthening her role as a responsible and constructive member of the global community. These aspirations are reflected in Thailand's candidature for a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for the term 2017-2018 and a member of the Human Rights Council (HRC) for a second term in 2015-2017.
20. As a medium-sized, developing country, we know full well the complexity of challenges faced by developing countries in pursuing sustainable development, enhancing respect for human rights while addressing both traditional and emerging security threats. We also understand the linkages between these issues and the fact that we cannot tackle each one of them on our own or in isolation.



21. If elected into the UNSC and the HRC, Thailand stands ready to act as a "Bridge for Partnerships" between the members and non-members, developed and developing countries, as well as between Asia and the rest of the world, on global issues and common concerns.

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Distinguished Delegates,

22. I am confident that this Sixty-ninth Session of the UN ESCAP will be fruitful and may I wish you every success in your work. I hereby declare open the 69<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission.

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