Country Statement
by
Mr. Thani Thongphakdi, Deputy Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand
at the 75th Session of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)
under the Theme “Empowering People and Ensuring Inclusiveness and Equality”
27 May 2019, 14.30–17.30 hrs., ESCAP Hall, UNCC, Bangkok
(5 Minutes)

Mr. Chair,

1. The journey towards 2030 is now a quarter of the way through. And from these first four years of implementing Agenda 2030, we have learned several things, among the most significant of which is that empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality are key to realising sustainable development.

2. Empowering people means unleashing their potential. They must both be included and have the ability to engage in decision-making on issues affecting their lives. For this to happen, however, there must be an enabling environment -- economically, politically, socially.

3. Over the past four decades, Thailand’s economy has grown almost tenfold and the people’s standard of living has much been improved. And yet, inequality remains. Allow me now to share with you what Thailand is doing -- not only to address inequality, but also to ensure an enabling environment for the people, especially the poor and the vulnerable, to truly prosper.

4. Thailand is undertaking structural reforms. The compass guiding our efforts is the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. Based on this, we have developed the 20-year National Strategy (2017-2037) and the 5-year National Economic and Social Development Plan (2018-2022). Examples of specific measures taken under these plans include the following.

5. On the social front, eligible children from poor families are given monthly financial support until they reach the age of six. The Government also provides a 15-year basic education to every child, regardless of nationality and legal status. An Equitable Education Fund has also been established to promote greater school enrollment. Our Universal Health Coverage (UHC) scheme covers 99.9 % of the population. The elderly also receive
monthly support to help with their basic needs. And in 2018, 74,000 jobs were created for persons with disabilities.

6. On financial policy, we now have the Excessive Interest Rate Prohibition Act B.E. 2560 (2017) to regulate the informal debt market and help prevent the poor from falling victim to loan sharks. The repurchasing law has been amended to ensure more bargaining power for the vulnerable in repurchasing contracts. And the new Forest Act gives in-kind financial security to farmers who grow high-value trees such as teak and rosewood.

7. On the economic front, the Government is working towards “Thailand 4.0”, or a valued-based economy driven by STI. This is because we recognise that while technology can disrupt our ways of doing, thinking and living, it can also be used to break our “business as usual” habits. So we have introduced a Geographic Information System to help farmers manage water resources and provided the disabled with assistive technology equipment to improve their livelihood. We believe that developing a national STI Roadmap is vital to helping achieve the SDGs. So at this year’s Commission Session, we have tabled a resolution on STI for SDGs and hope to receive your kind support.

Mr. Chair,

8. Achieving sustainable development requires concerted efforts. That is why Thailand has taken a whole-of-society approach -- what we call the “Pracharath” initiative for a Public-Private-People Partnership -- to addressing inequality and achieving the SDGs. Decentralization is key here. Governments must join hands with all stakeholders, especially local communities. This is how we can harness resources as well as the knowledge and wisdom of all sectors to co-create policies and solutions to the people’s problems.

9. Our concerted efforts must also extend beyond national borders because many problems are transboundary in nature. Indeed, national efforts should also contribute to sub-regional, regional and inter-regional cooperation to achieve the SDGs. Thailand has therefore decided to propose another resolution at this Commission Session to help materialise this vision. We would highly appreciate your support and co-sponsorship.

10. As the current ASEAN Chair and a candidate for ECOSOC membership for the years 2020-2022, Thailand remains committed to working constructively with ESCAP and all Member States and further engaging in
South-South and triangular cooperation to address the region’s development challenges in order to leave no one, and no country, behind.

Mr. Chair,

11. A reminder to close, and that is that all of you are invited to a reception tomorrow evening hosted by the Foreign Minister at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

12. Thank you.