

Mr. President,

First of all, let me express Thailand's appreciation to the Governments of Brazil and Egypt for co-sponsoring this panel discussion. It provides an important opportunity for us to ensure that the human rights dimension has a role in fiscal and monetary policies, particularly in times of economic downturn.

The ongoing global financial crisis has impacted on human rights in various ways, such as the right to work, the right to food, and the right to health. The crisis has also adversely undermined the efforts of many developing countries in their realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Therefore, in the Royal Thai Government's endeavours to protect the rights of our people during the recent economic crisis, we have placed people's welfare at the heart of our policies. Our foremost task is to ensure quality of life for all people, especially the poor and the vulnerable. In 2009, at the height of the global financial crisis, we faced a grim economic prospect of up to 2 million unemployed workers and a deep decline in exports and national production. Therefore, the Government made it a top priority to help the most vulnerable groups affected by the global financial crisis.

This includes a short-term stimulus package, ranging from price support for farmers to income support for low income earners and the elderly, as well as capacity building programs. This prevented millions of people from losing their jobs, while assuring basic incomes for our farmers – the backbone of our country. As a result, we were able to lower the unemployment rate to around 400,000.

The second medium- and long-term stimulus packages, launched at the end of last year, are aimed at boosting the country's long-term socio-economic capability and improving the basic infrastructure in order to advance the rights of our people as well to achieve higher competitiveness in various areas, including water management, alternative energy, transportation, communication, logistics, healthcare and education, the service sector and creative economy. One can say that in the case of Thailand, we have managed to turn the economic crisis into progress in the field of human rights.

Mr. President,

Not only has Thailand adopted a people-oriented approach in dealing with the economic crisis, but the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 also taught us a valuable lesson that moderation is the key to survival. To this end, we have embraced an alternative development philosophy called "Sufficiency Economy" which emphasizes responsible consumption, which could cushion against some of the adverse effects of globalization. By promoting responsible consumption and sustainable use of resources, this alternative model has proven successful in Thailand. And we would like to share our experiences with other countries. These measures range from fiscal disciplines, effective banking regulations, especially during economic booms, to a holistic agriculture management

ensuring that farmers have enough food supplies to feed their own families amidst risks arising from external economic factors and natural disasters.

Mr. President,

As Amartya Sen, one of Asia's most prominent thinkers and Nobel Prize laureates, stated: *true development is not about GDP growth, but about people having the freedom to be what they want to be*. Freedom is the empowerment of the people to actually know what they want and to equip them with the tools to pursue it. We believe that the foremost key to such freedom is education.

Therefore, a centre piece of this Government's pro-poor policy platform is the right to education for all. We introduced during our first 6 months in office the free 15-year basic education from kindergarten to senior high school, so as to ensure equal access to quality education for all. We have also launched a skills-training programme, which allows the unemployed and new graduates to acquire skills appropriate for the demands of the increasingly competitive market. This programme provides an opportunity for people to start their entrepreneurship with relevant skills to help them realize their freedom and fulfill their right to development.

Mr. President,

These are just a few of the people-centered policies that the present Thai Government is undertaking to alleviate the adverse impact of the economic and financial crisis on our society. I look forward to a very interesting discussion on this subject and hearing the views of other participants in this session.

Thank you.

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