

**Remarks by
His Excellency General Surayud Chulanont
Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand
at the Commemorative Summit
Marking the 15th Anniversary of ASEAN-China Dialogue Relations,
30 October 2006, Nanning**

Your Excellency Premier Wen Jiabao,
Your Excellency President Arroyo, Chairman of ASEAN,
Your Majesty,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

I am honoured to join my fellow ASEAN colleagues in thanking Premier Wen Jiabao for hosting this Commemorative Summit. I am grateful for the warm hospitality extended to me and my delegation in this dynamic city. Nanning is not only China's gateway to ASEAN, but is cherished by the Thai people as a sister city of Khon Kaen in Northeastern Thailand.

I am particularly delighted to meet with Premier Wen Jiabao and my distinguished ASEAN colleagues. I am touched by the warmth and solidarity that colleagues have shown not only during my recent visits, but especially here at this meeting. I appreciate the understanding you have demonstrated with regard to the events that led to my taking the office of Prime Minister. It was not something that I had expected, but now, having been entrusted with this important responsibility, I will do my utmost to meet the aspirations of the Thai people, to navigate a quick transition to a more substantive democracy. The support you have given to Thailand is most valued as we embark on a healing process, both in our national politics and in addressing the situation in our three southernmost provinces.

I wish to assure all of you that while addressing Thailand's domestic agenda, we will engage actively with our friends and partners. We continue to attach the highest importance to our relations with ASEAN and China to advance the shared objectives of maintaining peace, stability and prosperity in East Asia and beyond. As far as Thailand is concerned, we remain committed to an open economy. We will move ahead to sustain Thailand's economic dynamism and stability to support the region's growth and development.

In this effort, China has been one of ASEAN's most important partners. While we are here to commemorate 15 years of dialogue relations, our ties are deeply rooted in history. But during these 15 years, we have witnessed momentous developments in China. We have been impressed by China's truly remarkable economic growth and progress. China has become a locomotive for economic growth and regional dynamism, building synergies with partners in the various regions for common benefits. Indeed, forging successful

partnerships around the world for security and prosperity has been at the root of China's outstanding achievement.

Our special relationship derives its strength from the common challenges that we have successfully overcome. We have stood together through the Asian financial crisis of 1997 and the threat of SARS. Thailand was honoured to receive Premier Wen Jiabao at the Special ASEAN-China Leaders' Meeting on SARS in Bangkok in April 2003 as one of his first international meetings upon assuming office. In December 2004, when the Tsunami struck Southeast Asia, China was one of the first countries to extend a helping hand to affected ASEAN Member Countries. Truly, actions speak louder than words.

My ASEAN colleagues who have spoken before me have cited key milestones in our relations. China's accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia in 2003 stands out amongst the many accomplishments. But to me, the heart of our relations does not necessarily lie in documents or trade figures. Rather, it is embodied in the confidence and mutual understanding that we have accumulated over the years.

Moreover, as we take stock of our accomplishments, our vision should be oriented to the future. We should not only be widening ASEAN-China cooperation. Instead, we should also be striving to translate our commitment to enhancing peace and prosperity in the wider region into more concrete actions.

In this regard, I believe that community-building is the key. In order to tap the full potential of East Asia's diversity and resources, the strength of our community-building efforts should be marked by inclusiveness and not exclusiveness. We must focus on generating the widest flow of peoples, ideas and knowledge. Here, I wish to share my thoughts on some key steps for our future cooperation.

First, we need to continue promoting greater contacts between us at all levels. We need to plant the seeds of mutual appreciation and understanding among our youths and our young leaders. As a strong believer in the value of education, I am firmly of the view that greater education exchange between our universities would indeed foster better understanding among our young people. By doing so, we will ensure that our next generation will continue to nurture our special relations and partnership.

Last year, Thailand celebrated the 30th Anniversary of Sino-Thai relations with a number of activities to promote better understanding between our two peoples. Similar activities should be pursued under the ASEAN-China Dialogue framework.

Tourism is obviously a key area that we must jointly promote, alongside the exchanges between the various provinces of China and sister cities in ASEAN. Thailand takes pride in the successful linkage between Nanning and Khon Kaen. A group of over 100 people from Khon Kaen are now in Nanning to participate in the Third China-ASEAN Expo. We wish to see such special relationships being expanded to cover other provinces and cities.

Second, as our common goal is to enhance trade, investment and tourism, we need to improve transportation linkages. A major project under

consideration, the Mekong Bridge linking Xiangkhong (เชียงทอง) in Thailand and Huai Xai (หัวทราย) in Laos, will connect existing roads between China and ASEAN and could help serve as a gateway for Southwest China to the rest of the world. By fostering closer economic ties, it will also help narrow the development gap in the region. We also support Prime Minister Hun Sen's effort to reconstruct the "missing links" in the Singapore-Kunming Rail Link. More importantly, we look forward to the realization of the "liberalized regional air services arrangements" between ASEAN and China, as laid down in China's proposed Strategy for Establishing China-ASEAN Regional Air Services Arrangements.

Third, to facilitate and boost our relations in trade, investment and tourism, we need a one-stop service centre to serve as a focal point for exchanges between China and ASEAN. The proposal to establish the ASEAN-China Centre (ACC) in Beijing could provide our people with greater access to crucial information and opportunities. The Memorandum of Understanding to establish the ASEAN-China Centre would give impetus for the setting up of additional centres to provide services to other regions in China. Thus, we very much look forward to the future signing of this document, which will be another milestone in our relations.

I do hope that these suggestions will be well received. With joint efforts in these areas, a strong foundation for a prosperous East Asia will be laid, with tangible benefits for our peoples.

I am confident that this historic Summit and our Joint Statement will open up a new chapter of ASEAN-China relations. Let me reiterate that we regard China as our close friend and neighbour. We value the synergies that we have forged. And we look forward to further energizing our partnership in the years to come.

Thank you.

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