

Address
by
H.E. Dr. Kantathi Suphamongkhon
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand
at the Opening Ceremony of
The 8th Human Security Network Ministerial Meeting
Thursday 1 June 2006, The Dusit Thani Hotel, Bangkok

Your Excellency Mr. Kim Hak Su, Executive-Secretary of ESCAP,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Royal Thai Government and as Chair of the Human Security Network (HSN), it is a distinct honour and pleasure for me to warmly welcome you to the 8th Ministerial Meeting of the Human Security Network here in Bangkok.

Our network is indeed unique. We comprise countries from all regions of the world. We come from diverse backgrounds, in terms of history and levels of development. But a common vision unites us. This common vision places the human being at the centre of our policies. We want to see a world where people live with security and with dignity, free from fear and free from want. Human security must not only be an aspiration and a dream. Human security must be enjoyed in concrete ways by real people throughout the world.

I am pleased to see that since our Network was formed, the concept of human security has taken hold, both within states and between states. The United Nations World Summit Outcome Document of 2005 does not only make reference to human security. Rather, the entire document reflects international recognition of the importance of human security. Thanks to our efforts, together with those of other like-minded countries, the United Nations and the civil society, human security is now an important part of the mainstream international and domestic agendas.

Different countries and different regions tend to place different emphasis on human security. But we now have a consensus that modern threats to human security come in traditional and non-traditional kinds. Traditional issues such as armed conflict and communal strife continue to require our constant vigilance. International terrorism, human trafficking and migration, narcotic drugs, poverty, environmental degradation as well as life threatening diseases and natural disasters are also issues of human security that now require our prompt and concerted cooperation.

In this age of globalisation, billions of people live under the poverty line. They are still deprived of safe and secure livelihoods. Diseases and natural disasters continue to claim so many lives. The 2004 tsunami, for example, killed more people in our region than did all the armed conflicts in the past decade. Extremism and terrorism present direct threats to all of us, personally.

We must ensure that our Human Security Network does not lose momentum. We started with a bang back in 1999 and we must continue to produce concrete results. The

Network must remain a credible and effective force for providing political impetus to the cause of human security. We must be clear about our direction and our course of action. We should coordinate and cooperate with other states and with groups of states that are addressing similar subjects to avoid unnecessary duplication. We must raise awareness of human security at all levels—local, national, regional and international.

Excellencies,

Let me share with you some thoughts on what we have done in Thailand.

In Thailand, human security is about hope, dignity, physical safety and well-being. Freedom from want, freedom from fear, freedom to live in dignity as well as protection from diseases and natural disasters are all high on our national agenda. We feel that different aspects of human security are all inter-related. For example, freedom from want and freedom from fear are mutually dependent and both are indispensable.

Thailand has a long-standing international commitment to promote freedom from fear. We ratified the Mine Ban Convention in 1999, as well as many other human rights instruments, including the Optional Protocol on Children in Armed Conflicts. We have contributed to peacekeeping operations in different regions around the world, including in Timor-Leste, Afghanistan and Aceh.

Thailand has been promoting freedom from want on several fronts. At home, Thailand has been pursuing a sustainable development policy aimed at grassroots empowerment to ensure the population's immunity from internal and external economic shocks. This is our fight against poverty. For example, His Majesty the King's philosophy of Sufficiency Economy is central to our national development plan. Indeed, His Majesty's projects have done so much to improve the quality of life for people throughout Thailand, regardless of their ethnicity, religion or legal status. Just last week, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan presented His Majesty with the first UNDP Human Development Lifetime Achievement Award.

We in Thailand have pursued human-centred development projects with vigour. This weekend, you will see the Doi Tung Development Project, which promotes alternative high income earning activities to turn farmers away from opium cultivation permanently. The Mae Fah Luang Foundation, which runs this project, has also been helping other countries facing similar problems. In addition to its work in Myanmar, the Foundation has extended assistance to Afghanistan, which earlier this year sent a delegation led by its Deputy Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development to attend the International Panel for Afghanistan on Sustainable Alternative Livelihood Development, held at Doi Tung. Representatives from the Indonesian province of Aceh also attended the meeting to request the Project's assistance in tackling its own cannabis problem.

You will also see our "Baan Mankong" or secure housing programme, as well as the One-Village One Product Scheme. Also known as OTOP, this scheme provides local communities with the opportunity to use their local wisdom to make products for the international marketplace, with the government assisting in product design and marketing to help create value.

In regards to the protection against natural disasters and contagious diseases, we have also been working hard. An Early Warning System to protect people from future tsunamis is now in place. In regards to contagious diseases, Thai scientists and researchers are working in coordination with their colleagues around the world to find new and effective medications and vaccines to protect people from HIV/AIDS and Avian Influenza. We are also helping our neighbours and different countries around the world to protect their people from these same diseases.

Excellencies,

As I review the work of the Human Security Network, it seems to me that our HSN is now at a crossroads. This means that now is the time to revitalise our role to ensure that we can continue to contribute in concrete terms to the enhancement of human security around the world.

On our part, Thailand, as the Chair of the Human Security Network, has organised many events over the past year. Highlights include meetings on HIV/AIDS and human trafficking, to the convening of the International Symposium earlier this week to build and synergise partnership for global human security and development with members of civil society, international organisations and other partners.

Looking ahead, I propose that we explore the following collectively. We must enhance our outreach, both internally and externally.

Internally, we should promote deeper awareness of human security issues among our people. We must encourage maximum involvement from the general public. Governments should act in partnership with civil societies, international organizations and all other relevant groups. We should encourage the top-down and bottom-up approaches at the same time, with healthy interaction between the government and the people.

Externally, we should build partnerships with individual states and groups of states outside our Network. We need to learn from their experience and share with them ours. In other words, we need to create a network of Friends of the HSN. Each of us can engage other countries in dialogue. If there are projects or activities that we can work with others jointly, we should proceed. Lessons learnt or new ideas from our activities outside of the HSN can then be shared with the rest of us in the Network.

We should encourage a balanced approach towards both freedom from want and freedom from fear. The two freedoms are linked. The elimination of the illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons will reduce the threat posed by extremism and terrorism as well as drug trafficking. The elimination of landmines will enhance economic development and trade. We must therefore redouble our efforts to mobilise alternative sources of financing to address the problem of landmines throughout the world.

We should broaden the scope of our focus into non-traditional threats to human security. This includes the need to address the problem of environmental degradation as well as life threatening diseases and natural disasters. Indeed, during the Human Security Network International Symposium on Building and Synergizing Partnership for Global Human Security and Development, held here in Bangkok yesterday and the day before, it was proposed that “freedom from hazard impact” be added to our list of concerned topics.

Human security is about human empowerment. We must put even more energy into human resource development. This is the best way to prepare people to effectively address human security issues at all levels. Here I must emphasise the importance of cooperation between governments, civil societies and the people at large, including members of the grassroots communities. This is the top-down plus bottom-up approach.

We must get the broad public involved in advancing human security now. This can be referred to as the “freedom from exclusion”, which means the need to engage all stakeholders in all human security endeavours.

Excellencies,

The next few years will be critical to our Human Security Network. The on-going United Nations reform efforts will significantly affect the cause of human security around the world. The Human Security Network needs to make the most of this opportunity to turn our common dream of a “secure world with freedom from want, freedom from fear, and freedom to live in dignity” into reality. Let us use this Human Security Network meeting in Bangkok to review our progress, to reaffirm our shared commitments and goals, and to come up with concrete plans for concrete action. We have a lot of work to do in the next couple of days. In addition to that, I want you to enjoy your stay in Thailand.

Thank you very much.
