

**An Opening and Keynote Address
by H.E. Mr. Chaturon Chaisang, Minister of Education, Thailand
on "Southeast Asia Education, Working Together
for a Sustainable Future"
at the "Worlddidac Asia 2013 and the
5th Asia Education Leaders Forum"
on Wednesday 9th October, 2013 at 09.30-10.00 hrs.
at the Queen Sirikit National Convention Centre, Bangkok**

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Mr. Chainarong Limpkittisin (ชัยณรงค์ ลิ้มปึกัดดีสิน), Managing Director of
Reed Tradex Company,

Exhibitors,

Supporting Associations,

Members of the Press,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my very great pleasure and honour to have been invited to open this forum and share my perspective on "Southeast Asia Education, Working Together for a Sustainable Future". I admire the joint collaboration between SEAMEO, UNESCO, WORLDDICAC and the Reed Tradex Company and congratulate them for their success in bringing educators together from many countries around the world. This is very encouraging for the education community in Thailand and ASEAN.

Thailand has been quite successful in providing educational access for all and Thai literacy rates have generally been high. Nevertheless, criticisms of the Thai education system have been increasing in recent years. Too many efforts are still being made to memorise large chunks of information. Rote learning has been the cornerstone of education for too long. Thai students are not taught to think critically; they spend too much time rote learning in the classroom and end up with poor analytical skills. Most Thai teachers still use teacher-centred modes of information dissemination. These are, of course, generalizations and we also hear of Thai student successes in various educational and academic competitions, of scholastic achievements, and examples of teaching excellence. But they are the exceptions.

This is the case in Thailand and I believe that several countries in Southeast Asia can relate to it. For Thailand, the need for change and to re-define education imperatives has been accepted, and a major reform programme is in the process of being implemented. The Thai Government is committed to major education reform. It is now focused on improving Thai students' performance and achievements in key subject areas measured by the Programme for International Student Assessment, or PISA.

Specifically, the whole learning system, from the curriculum to teaching-learning, along with assessment and evaluation, will be reformed. The purpose of this major reform is to improve students' critical thinking ability, self-learning and problem-solving skills. The current system of teacher training and development will also be reviewed and

improved to ensure that there are sufficient numbers of suitably qualified Thai teachers. Teachers will be assessed and promoted in line with their successes in improving students' performance and achievements. The Ministry of Education intends to promote increased involvement of private sector, employer and industry groups and to encourage private sector entities to assume greater responsibility in supporting and conducting educational programmes.

The Thai Government is also committed to raising the quality of vocational education to an international standard consistent with the needs of the country. This will involve using a vocational qualifications framework to establish the skills, knowledge and capabilities needed by employers.

To improve the standards of technical and vocational education, further development of a dual education system will be encouraged. This requires increased involvement and participation by the private sector and industry groups at all stages of technical and vocational education and training. Workplace experience and formal classroom instruction will be focused. Ultimately, it is hoped to raise the proportion of learners in vocational and general education streams to a ratio of 50:50.

Thai higher education institutions will be encouraged to emphasise quality rather than quantity development. The government is strongly committed to supporting Thai universities to become more internationally recognised. With an aspiration to improve the ranking of Thai universities, university rankings will also be used as a guide in developing the quality and standards of Thai universities compared to

acknowledged world-class universities. Such improvement will include encouraging Thai universities to undertake research, innovation and technology through mechanisms such as performance-based budget allocations.

Ensuring 21st century competencies and skills for all may mean different things for developing and developed countries in the Southeast Asia region. The integration of the ASEAN Community in 2015 has encouraged its Member States to learn about each other's languages and cultures. English has also become its official language. This is in consistent with the growing global connectivity that is forcing countries to improve their citizens' English language skills.

Language skills, together with digital literacy, and critical thinking skills, are widely recognised among the basic competencies needed in the twenty-first century. They can increase access to new information as the foundations for knowledge building, innovation and economic diversification. They also enhance social, academic and occupational mobility. Thus, another important priority for education in Thailand is the expansion of ICTs in education and the wider teaching of languages, particular English and Mandarin Chinese.

Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The integration of the ASEAN Community in 2015 will enhance cooperation in all three pillars, comprising ASEAN Economic

Community, ASEAN Political-Security Community, and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. These three pillars have been identified with implications for the field of education and with the recognition of education's role in narrowing the development gap among ASEAN Member States.

Thailand's Ministry of Education strongly supports ASEAN's priorities for education, as documented in the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Blueprint and the ASEAN 5-Year Work Plan on Education. Apart from building the ASEAN identity, most of the priorities in the ASCC Blueprint are consistent with targets reflected in the Millennium Development Goals,(MDGs),including human development, social welfare and protection, social justice and rights, narrowing development gaps, and ensuring environmental sustainability.

These priorities are included in the ASEAN 5-Year Work Plan on Education (2011-2015) which addresses the awareness of regional identity, the importance of universal access to high quality basic education, the need for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) to be responsive to economic needs, and for higher education to deliver world-class instructional programmes and research.

Thailand appreciates the contribution of the ASEAN University Network (AUN) and the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) to cross-border mobility and the internationalisation of education. The role of the AUN in establishing an AUN Quality Assurance process and the AUN-ASEAN Credit Transfer

System has been well recognized. On the other hand, we also appreciate SEAMEO's initiatives in priorities for education, such as twenty-first century skills, professional development for teachers and educational personnel, Education for All, Education for Sustainable Development, higher education and TVET.

Nevertheless, I would like to encourage SEAMEO and ASEAN to work more vigorously in establishing an ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework to address academic and professional accreditation standards across the ASEAN region. Such a framework will help support credit transfers and the mutual recognition, integration and harmonisation of qualifications in both vocational and higher education sectors, as well as promote student/worker mobility across participating ASEAN countries.

So far, collaboration in the ASEAN education sector has focused more on higher education rather than on TVET. However, TVET is an area of particular concern since the economies of many ASEAN Member States have expanded rapidly and continuously amidst their shortages of skilled workers. Personally, I admire the fact that ASEAN's cooperation with other participating countries in the East Asia Summit , as reflected in the EAS Education Plan of Action 2012-2015, has been inclined to facilitate regional cooperation in TVET. This Plan of Action was adopted with priorities to develop a regional TVET quality assurance framework, to facilitate TVET teacher and student mobility, and to conduct a feasibility study to establish a register of TVET providers in the EAS.

I would also like to draw your attention to the ASEAN Environmental Education Action Plan 2008-2012 which reflected ASEAN's contribution to the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. Amongst other goals, the ASEAN Curriculum Sourcebook also addresses the themes of connecting global diversity and local identity as well as working together for a sustainable future.

In Thailand, as in many other parts of the world, we live in challenging times. In the field of education, this is particularly the case. We are approaching the end of an era. The target date for achieving the Millennium Development Goals is 2015. The end of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development is 2014. The ASEAN Community will progress to a new level of integration in 2015. And, the EFA movement launched by UNESCO in 1990 is now almost 25 years old.

Increasingly, educators are turning to the next era of education, whether it is described as "Education Post-2015", "Education for 21st Century Skills", "Education for a Sustainable Future", or in some other way. Whatever the terminology, we can be reasonably sure that globalisation trends will become more pronounced and will greatly impact the future of education. Indeed, they already do. Globalisation is a phenomenon that needs to be addressed because it has changed the way we live. I regard challenge positively and believe that we can no longer afford to live as isolated nations or regional communities. We cannot ignore the inhabitants of other parts of this planet, and their problems. Actions and decisions of ordinary citizens are today more likely to affect others across the globe than ever before.

A challenge across much of the ASEAN region, including Thailand, is that of replacing traditional instruction in schools which tend to educate students and to process them into roles for economic production. Schools have traditionally processed students through stratified steps leading to predictable, marketable credentials for the marketplace, rather than for broader citizenship and social responsibilities. Education must fully assume its central role in helping people to forge more just, peaceful, tolerant and inclusive societies. It must give people the understanding, skills and values they need to co-operate in resolving the interconnected challenges of the twenty-first century.

The international developments, as aforementioned, have several common themes. The dominant theme is the need to prepare students to belong to a global community and for global citizenship. In order to achieve this goal, it is essential to ensure that teacher education adequately prepares teachers for their new roles and responsibilities.

I think it is a crucial time to re-examine the social expectations of schools and teachers. Society anticipates that teachers and schools have the ability not only to prepare students for the workforce but also to nurture them as global citizens. This is reflected in the trends and initiatives originating from the UN and UNESCO. The UN Secretary-General's Global Education First Initiative stresses the need for a global perspective in education. Likewise, the UNESCO's teaching and learning for sustainable future programme promotes a new vision of education that helps students better understand the world in which they live and the complexity and inter-connectedness of trans-national problems and issues.

Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

In terms of working together for a sustainable future, Thailand has always strongly supported regional and international bodies, including SEAMEO and UNESCO. This will continue with the signing of a Framework Agreement for Cooperation between ASEAN and UNESCO in November this year.

Education has been and will always be a major part in any bilateral and international collaboration. There is no doubt that education is an essential mechanism in preparing our citizens not only for the regional integration but also for a wider global context. The ultimate goal of education is to assist all learners to achieve their full potential, to be able to adapt to the multicultural society and to cope with a world characterized by change. Education is of pivotal importance in shaping the world we live in, respect for others, and the environment.

In offering this perspective, the Ministry of Education of Thailand invites collaboration with all countries and international agencies. We are very happy to share our experiences in detail and learn from the successes of others. Once again, I would like to extend my appreciation to Reed Tradex Company for organizing this Forum. On behalf of the Thai Government, I would like to welcome you all and wish you every success in your deliberations. With these remarks, I now declare this Forum officially opened.

Thank you very much.
