Opening Remarks
by
H.E. Mr. Vijavat Isarabhakdi
Advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand
at the Midterm Review of the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development
on 26 November 2018, United Nations Conference Center, Bangkok
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Madam Executive Secretary,
Ms. Laura Londén, Deputy Executive Director of UNFPA,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Five years ago here in this same building, ESCAP Member States gathered to adopt the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development, outlining region-specific policy directions and priority actions in the area of population and development. This outcome document provides the basis for the regional review meeting taking place today, and it will inform the “Review and Appraisal of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and its contribution to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” at the Commission on Population and Development in 2019.

When the Member States assembled in Cairo in 1994 to adopt the Programme of Action, we recognized that the world had undergone far-reaching changes. Thanks to national and international efforts, significant progress had been made in many fields important for human welfare. However, despite such advancements, developing countries still faced serious economic difficulties. The number of people living in poverty was still high. The natural resources on which future generations would depend for their survival were continually being depleted, and environmental degradation was on the rise. A global consensus, therefore, arose on the need to collectively address the critical challenges and interrelationship between population and sustained economic growth within the context of sustainable development. The ICPD Programme of Action was the document that summarized these views and identified follow-up actions.

The Programme of Action recommends a set of important population and development objectives as well as qualitative, not only quantitative, goals. It asserts that the true focus of development policy must be the improvement of individual lives. This is very much in line with the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, or SEP, conceived by His Majesty the
Late King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand, which aims to empower the people and communities.

Over the past 2 decades, the Programme of Action has contributed to major improvements in poverty reduction, health, especially reproductive and sexual health, education, child and maternal mortality reduction, as well as women's empowerment and gender equality. However, notwithstanding such progress, we should not be complacent as these development gains have not yet reached everyone, and significant gaps and inequalities still exist. Much remains to be accomplished. We, therefore, must demonstrate our renewed commitments to addressing them.

While governments have the main responsibility to cope with these challenges, depending on the public sector alone will no longer work. The bureaucratic systems and limited budgets of governments are somewhat major constraints. Partnerships and international cooperation are essentially required if we are to achieve our intentional targets. All members and all groups in society have the right, and indeed the responsibility, to play an active part in efforts to reach those goals. Adequate and innovative resource mobilization is therefore needed to strengthen the capacity of national, regional and international institutions to implement this Programme of Action and Ministerial Declaration.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Improving the well-being of the people is essentially the ultimate goal of any administration. Allow me here to cite a few examples of actions taken by the Government of Thailand, particularly in the area of population and development, to improve the people’s livelihood.

Thailand’s population development policy has been holistically incorporated into the 12th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2017–2021), taking into consideration the demographic transition towards an ageing society and specific challenges facing the Thai population in all dimensions, such as health, education, inequality and human capital development.

Thailand is a pioneer in Universal Health Coverage, or UHC, among developing countries. Our UHC, with coverage of 99.9 % of the population, has resulted in a substantial reduction in the levels of out-of-pocket payments, preventing many poor households from impoverishment. In 2016, Thailand was certified by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a
country that had eliminated mother-to-child transmission of HIV and congenital syphilis, becoming the second non-OECD country after Cuba to achieve this goal. In 2015, access to basic education for the school-age population stood at 90.1% and the level continues to increase. The Thai Government provides such education to every child, regardless of their nationality and legal status, and grants Thai citizenship to foreign children born in Thailand in accordance with specified criteria and conditions.

The Government also strives to make sure that migrant workers can live with dignity in our country. Through the expansion of legal employment channels, migrant workers are protected from various forms of exploitation, including forced labour, debt bondage and worst forms of child labour. Thailand has also been promoting ethical recruitment and a Good Labour Practices (GLP) programme for the business sector. Moreover, a ‘Hotline’ has been set up with the option of three different languages for migrants seeking assistance.

These are just a few examples of the measures taken by the Thai Government and the remarkable achievements that have been made. Yet we do recognize that much more has to be done to tackle the remaining challenges.

One of these challenges is that of an aging society. As a nation, Thailand is ageing rapidly. By 2040, the country will see the number of elderly persons reaching close to 21 million people, or 31 per cent of the entire population. We therefore need more actively to prepare people who are approaching retirement age so that they remain healthy enough to be resourceful persons and not become a burden to the society.

Another challenge is the notable increase in adolescent pregnancies. We have tried to cope with this issue by enacting two years ago the Act for Prevention and Solution of the Adolescent Pregnancy Problem B.E. 2559 (2016). The aim was to bring down the number of adolescent pregnancies. The effectiveness of this legislation should become apparent in the years ahead.

To tackle population and development issues, Thailand embraces a whole-of-society approach. A Public-Private-People Partnership, or the so-called “Pracharath” initiative, has been established to harness resources, knowledge and wisdom of all sectors of the society to come up with effective solutions to people’s problems. For example, 12 private companies have joined in education reform to create model partnership schools and to assist teachers to use modern teaching and learning techniques. Large and medium-sized corporations have adopted the principles of sustainable development to
their business practices according to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGP).

**Excellencies,**  
**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Thailand stands ready to engage and work constructively with ESCAP, UNFPA and all the Member States in addressing population and development challenges. Recently, the Thailand International Cooperation Agency, or TICA, under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, together with UNFPA Country Offices in Thailand, Bhutan and Laos, have implemented a Programme on Facilitating Cooperation for Making Motherhood Safer. Thailand’s success in maternal health care and services has allowed the country to share and exchange its experiences with other countries, especially those that face a high Maternal Mortality Rate. This is truly a concrete example of South-South Cooperation.

As Thailand takes on the ASEAN chairmanship next year, (actually, the gavel has already arrived in Bangkok), please rest assured that our commitments to the Asia-Pacific region and to the world remain firm. And as a candidate for the ECOSOC membership for the year 2020-2022, Thailand is committed to join global efforts in advancing the population and development agenda and in achieving the SDGs, in order to fulfill the 2030 Agenda’s ultimate goal of leaving no one behind.

Allow me to take this opportunity to congratulate and thank ESCAP and UNFPA for co-hosting this Midterm Review. My appreciation also goes to civil society organizations who have worked tirelessly to provide services to those in need.

Finally, I hope that this three-day meeting will provide us with a platform to assess our progress against the commitments we made in 2013 and to recommit ourselves to greater efforts to address the remaining challenges. As a wise man named Albert Einstein once said: “We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them”. Today, we have a greater duty than ever to jointly find innovative forms of partnership and cooperation towards achieving a healthy population and a sustainable world. I wish the meeting a successful outcome. I certainly hope you have a pleasant stay here in Bangkok, and will have some free time to take in the sights and enjoy some shopping.

I thank you.