



**PERMANENT MISSION OF THAILAND
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

351 EAST 52ND STREET · NEW YORK, NY 10022
TEL (212) 754-2230 • FAX (212) 688-3029

Statement

by

His Excellency Mr. Don Pramudwinai

Ambassador and Permanent Representative

of Thailand to the United Nations

at the Plenary of the 63rd Session of the UN General Assembly

Agenda Item 45: Culture of Peace

New York, 13 November 2008

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Distinguished Heads of State and Government,

His Excellency President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this landmark meeting of the General Assembly. I also would like to extend, on behalf of the Government and the people of the Kingdom of Thailand, our sincere appreciation and strong support for the commendable leadership taken by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and Her Excellency President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo of the Philippines. Thailand shares your noble objectives and aspirations, and is ready and willing to do whatever we can to support their realization.

Thailand is confident that this meeting will send a strong and unequivocal message to all corners of the world that world leaders are united in a common pursuit of mutual respect and understanding, dialogue, tolerance, harmony and peaceful co-existence.

Mr. President,

Unity in diversity is what has characterized a country that is today called Thailand for many centuries. Peaceful co-existence is what Thai people have grown up with and practiced in their daily lives- at times subconsciously. Because of its openness and its strategic location between the Far East, South Asia, the Middle East and the West, Thailand has long been at the crossroads of civilizations, cultures, religions and movements of people. From the past to the present, many people of different civilizations, cultures and religions have made this land their home, where they have lived peacefully and harmoniously together as Thais.

Tolerance is also a part of who we are. That is why freedom to practice any religion or faith has been consistently guaranteed throughout the country's history. Today, while Buddhism is a religion practiced by the majority of the Thai people, there are also thriving communities of Thai people who practice Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Confucianism and Sikhism. His Majesty the King of Thailand himself is a patron of all major faiths in the country.

For many who visited Thailand, a sight of Buddhist temples, Islamic mosques, Christian churches, Hindu temples as well as places of worship for Sikhism, Confucianism situated in the same vicinity is not at all uncommon. Nor is a sight of various cultural activities all year round that represents the diversity of the Thai Nation. Inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue is indeed not just something we envision. It is part of our way of life.

But we know that we cannot take this unity in diversity in Thailand or anywhere for granted. And we will not.

Mr. President,

Forces unleashed by globalization have brought down physical barriers. Globalization driven by the advancement of information and communication technology has revolutionized the way that we see, feel and experience each other as a part of human family. We are now closer to one another than in anytime in human history.

Yet, the very same forces that brought us so close together have also driven many of us so far from each other. Closeness and sameness sometimes create fear in many vulnerable hearts and minds – fear of losing one’s perceived “identity” in the face of globalization. Unequal and unjust distribution of the fruit of globalization has also bred a sense of alienation among the “have-nots”. These fear and alienation, real or imagery, especially among the youth, have been exploited by those who harbour hatred and intolerance for “the Other”; those who attempted to sow the seed of discord and disharmony in the soil of unity and harmony; and those who distorted the compassionate and noble teachings of religions for their narrow self-serving interests.

These people of ill-will want to divide us. They want to make the Clash of Civilizations a self-fulfilling prophecy. But they will not succeed because we will not let them. It is important that we do all we can to unite when they want to divide; to reach out to each other where they want to separate; and, together, bring the full force of compassion and common humanity to bear on those who preach intolerance and “us versus them” paradigm.

Mr. President,

Unity, harmony and compassion have to be continuously nurtured and strengthened. Thailand is committed to actively promote unity, harmony and compassion everywhere in the world because we believe that a success in one part will contribute to a success of all, for we are part of the same human family. We have been involved in many initiatives from community level, national level, regional level, cross-regional level to global level.

For example, in June 2008, Thailand co-hosted with the Netherlands the Fourth Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Interfaith Dialogue in Amsterdam. The meeting brought participants from Asia and Europe together to meet “face-to-face” to have a “faith-to-faith” dialogue. As also a Chair of ASEAN, Thailand will continue to work closely with our ASEAN family members to ensure that ASEAN will continue to be a shining example of unity in diversity. We will also continue to actively participate in various meetings in the frameworks of interfaith dialogue and the Alliance of Civilizations. In 2010, Thailand will host the Third Asia-Middle East Dialogue (AMED) with an aim to enhance mutual understanding and foster closer ties between East Asia and the Middle East.

We view all these initiatives as mutually reinforcing. But we are also well aware of the fact that the measure of success of these initiatives will depend on how we translate ideas and wisdoms into concrete actions for the benefit of our people on the ground. To this end, Thailand would like to highlight three key points as follows:

First, multi-stakeholder leadership at all levels is vital. Political, religious and community leaders have a key role to play in promoting and reinforcing unity, harmony and compassion. Other sectors of the society should also be brought on board, especially the media. All of us should do all we can to ensure that the enhanced power of media in this globalized world shall be channeled to positive endeavours in pursuit of understanding, harmony and peace among different communities.

Second, we should strive to disseminate correct interpretation of principles and teachings of our respective religions and faiths, while also promoting respect for other religions and faiths. Voices of moderation, tolerance and compassion should be promoted. So far, Thailand has been working closely with our friends in the region and beyond to encourage more frequent exchanges of religious leaders and scholars. We are truly grateful to all our friends near and far for the cooperation. We are particularly grateful to His Majesty King Abdullah II of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for graciously bringing the Amman Message to Thailand during His Majesty's visit to Thailand in 2005. We are also very pleased with a visit to Thailand last year of H.E. Dr. Mohammad Sayid Tantawy, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar of Egypt, and felt very much touched then by his message of peace, tolerance and harmony.

Third, we must give all possible attention to our youth. We must instill love, compassion, mutual respect, tolerance and non-violence from their early age. This can be done through both formal education and extra-curriculum activities. We must do our utmost to prevent a sense of alienation from developing in the minds of our youth because this will make them vulnerable to intolerant ideologies. For those who have been alienated and exposed to intolerance, we must help them to unlearn these experiences and redirect them towards a right course of action. In this regard, Thailand has been promoting youth exchanges between different regions of the country and with countries in various parts of the world in order to widen their worldviews and promote mutual understanding and appreciation of differences. Early next year, Thailand will host the ASEM Interfaith Cultural Youth Camp Project, which will provide a forum for Asian and European youths to get to know each other, and engage in inter-faith and inter-cultural activities.

Mr. President,

This General Assembly meeting is one such powerful demonstration of global leadership that will certainly have profound implications. But it is not the end of the journey. Rather, it marks a new chapter in the global effort to foster culture of peace and promote inter-faith dialogue. The challenge for us is to get this message of peace, unity, compassion, tolerance and harmony to all houses, classrooms and community centers in each and every country. Because when our peoples share passion for compassion, the culture of peace will prevail.

Thank you, Mr. President.