

Opening Remarks
by
H.E. Mr. Kasit Piromya,
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand
at
The Bangkok Workshop on Achieving a Mine-Free South-East Asia
Bangkok
2 April 2009

His Excellency Jürg Streuli (เกียรติยศ สตรอยลึ่), President of the Ninth Meeting of the States Parties to the Mine Ban Convention,
His Excellency Ivan Hotek, Ambassador of the Czech Republic to Thailand and EU Local Presidency,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and pleasure for me to open this Regional Workshop on Achieving a Mine-Free South-East Asia in Bangkok this morning. We in Thailand and our neighbours in South-East Asia are well aware of the importance of eliminating landmines as we know first-hand the misery and suffering such weapons cause. Many of the victims are here with us today bearing the scars of such a cruel and inhumane weapon which has no place in today's world.

The large number of experts and operators with extensive knowledge and experience in mine clearing participating in the workshop today attests to the importance of this issue. Progress achieved thus far in eliminating landmines from the region is also due in part to the donor countries, as well as international and non-governmental organisations, representatives of which are here with us today. Today's Workshop has also received support from the European Union, for which we are extremely grateful.

Excellencies,

Thailand was the first country in South-East Asia to become a State Party to the Mine Ban Convention in 1999. We have done our utmost to fulfill our obligations under the Convention, which include destruction of landmines in our stockpile and arsenal, landmine clearance, victim assistance, and the promotion of universal acceptance of the Convention. During Thailand's Presidency of the Fifth

Meeting of the States Parties to the Mine Ban Convention or 5MSP from 2003 to 2004, we championed and focused our efforts towards the achievement of universality of the Convention. Here, let me take this opportunity to invite those South-East Asian neighbours who have yet to join the Convention to do so. We also highlighted and promoted the linkage between mine action and development. Thailand has redoubled its efforts in victim assistance these past years. Last July, Thailand ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. We also passed the Persons with Disabilities Empowerment Act 2007 and the Education for Persons with Disabilities Act 2007. These two Acts were enacted to comply with this Convention and to support victim assistance. We have also launched other initiatives which you will hear in greater detail during this Workshop.

Despite these great strides towards fulfilling our obligations under the Convention, Thailand, like many other countries of the region, still face many challenges, including resources and funding. That is why we requested the extension of the deadline for completing the destruction of landmines in mined areas by another 9 and a half years until 1 November 2018. International cooperation is vital for us to fulfill our obligations. International cooperation, especially technical and financial assistance, is required to help states in need of assistance overcome their limitations. That is why today's Workshop with the participation of donor countries and agencies is an important step towards achieving the goals set forth in the Convention.

Yesterday, you had the chance to witness first-hand Thailand's mine clearance operations and victim assistance programmes in Sakaew and Chiangmai provinces. Today, you will be sharing your experiences, technical know how, and best practices on these issues. You will also be exploring ways in which the international community, be they state actors or international organisations, can further assist countries in the region towards realising a mine-free, zero-new-victim South-East Asia. It is my hope the day's proceedings will help the region achieve such a noble aim and I wish you every success in your Workshop.

Thank you.
