

Remarks by  
H.E.Dr. Kantathi Suphamongkhon  
Thailand Trade Representative and  
Advisor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs  
At a Luncheon in Honor of the Participants of  
The Workshop on Trade Facilitation and the WTO  
Pathumwan Princess Hotel  
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Ambassador Manaspas Xuto,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of Dr. Surakiart Sathirathai, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, I would like to extend a warm welcome to all participants from the ACD countries in this 2-day Workshop on Trade Facilitation and the WTO, organized by the International Institute for Trade and Development (ITD).

Allow me to express my congratulations to Ambassador Manaspas Xuto, Executive Director of ITD, whose energetic and active role in promoting cooperation among Asian countries is much appreciated. I have known Ambassador Manaspas for a long time. He is a man of wisdom and a man of limitless energy. He is and always will be, one of Thailand's very distinguished diplomats. The ITD is very lucky to have Ambassador Manaspas as its Executive Director.

The ITD is a valuable partner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Its challenge is to respond to developing countries' growing needs for more training and more capacity-building in the area of the international economic cooperation. I am hopeful that the ITD can work closely with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as with international organizations such as UNCTAD, UNESCAP and the WTO toward the common and very important endeavor of capacity-building in trade negotiations.

Today, international trade is vital to economic growth. Globalization is here to stay with us for a while. We can either benefit from globalization or, it can hurt us. The choice is ours. Success or failure depends on our knowledge, our capacity and our strategy.

We are now seeing challenges to global trade coming in different shapes and forms. Deep understanding, misunderstanding and ignorance have led to action with substantial impact on global trade. I am convinced that many people with strong feelings for or against the WTO still do not have sufficient understanding of the WTO. In fact, earlier this year, I was in a major industrialized country. Please forgive me for not naming the country for you here. Well, I was talking to some leading business executives and I mentioned the WTO. A couple of individuals looked surprised. They said to me that the problem with the WTO had been resolved. There is no longer a WTO. Then they explained to me that the WTO was hit and completely destroyed by two planes on September 11. I had to immediately explain to them the difference between the World Trade Center and the World Trade Organization. I can see that Dr. Supachai has diverse tasks to perform in front of him.

The key point that must be emphasized over and over again is the importance of knowledge and strategy. Today, the possession of natural resources in our hands is not as important as having the right strategy to succeed in the world. This means capacity-building. This means sharing experiences and learning from one another. This is why workshops such as this one are so important. In fact, an older gentleman by the name of Otto von Bismarck, born on April Fool's Day in 1815, the Founder of the German Empire, once observed that only "a fool" would wait to learn from his mistakes, "a wise person" would learn from other people's mistakes. I wonder how Bismarck would have described a person who doesn't even learn from his mistakes!

Success in today's world depends so much on our ability to facilitate trade. This related to a wide range of activities including customs procedures, transportation formalities, insurance and other financial requirements. It sounds complicated and it is complicated. We must therefore use modern technology to facilitate international trade. We shall rely on the ITD to propose new ways and means to facilitate trade. We shall also rely on the ITD to help strengthen the ACD process. ACD will, in turn, strengthen Asia's ability to succeed and to play a constructive role in the international system.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me say a few words about the ACD process. Up until this year, Asia lacked an Asia-wide forum for the exchanges of views. Don't forget that Asia actually extends from Japan all the way across to the Middle East. This is why Thailand decided to propose the ACD. The first ACD meeting took place in June of this year. We wanted a small group of countries from different parts of Asia to attend this first meeting. It was very successful. It was attended by ministers from 17 Asian countries.

The ACD is a non-institutionalized forum for the exchange of ideas and experiences. It complements existing forums. It address subjects of importance to trade and development within and beyond Asia. This includes capacity-building, tourism, bio-diversity, energy security, transportation linkages, e-commerce, e-government, infrastructure and the strengthening of SMEs.

As Thailand Trade Representative, the Prime Minister has asked me to focus on 120 countries. I have seen successes around the world. I have also seen failures around the world. Countries in Asia must work together. We must together ensure that our diversity is turned into strength. We must not compete against one another. Instead, we must sit together and design a win-win strategy. We must together enhance our competitiveness. This will enable us to once again enjoy sustained economic growth and make Asia a dynamic trading partner with the rest of the world.

Trade facilitation will play a key role in all of this. I hope this workshop will be useful to all of you. Today and tomorrow, you will have opportunities to discuss important ideas with your colleagues and friends. You must ensure that when you go home, good ideas from this workshop will be translated into practical steps. I wish each and everyone of you every success.

Thank you