

Keynote Speech
by
Prime Minister of Thailand,
Abhisit Vejjajiva

**President of the NACC, Commissioners,
Country Directors of the World Bank, the
Asian Development Bank, and Transparency
International, Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen:**

I am delighted to be here this morning to address this important gathering of government officials, executives, scholars, practitioners, and members of the press. It is gratifying to know that, though coming from many places around the world, all of you are meeting on this occasion for one common purpose – that is, to try to prevent, reduce, and eventually eradicate corruption from our societies.

Corruption is indeed a serious problem that we have been trying to combat for a long long time. Despite the fact that it is commonly condemned by the public, a crime prohibited by law, yet it still remains widespread in many societies. It is a threat to national security – jeopardizing not only the country’s financial well-being but also its socio-economic development efforts and, most importantly, the moral fabric of the nation in the longer term.

As we all know, corruption takes many shapes and forms. The simplest form is bribery. When an official accepts, solicits, or extorts a bribe, or when private agents give or offer bribes to an official, for the purpose of evading compliance with rules and regulations, or gaining profit and advantage over their competitors, public office is abused. The public office can also be abused through patronage and nepotism, theft of state assets, or diversion or misuse of state revenues. And indeed, in our fight against corruption we must be aware all the time that the shape and form of corruption continue to evolve in keeping with changing circumstances, whether it is the global environment or the

regulatory environment in particular societies.

But whatever form and shape it takes, an abuse of public office for private gain means diverting the country’s resources for the benefit of only a few individuals or groups, rather than channeling them to the public good or to the people in general – that is, to society as a whole.

What is perhaps even more alarming is that through the long history of corruption more and more people are becoming used to having a corrupt environment, which more dangerously still appears to make it more acceptable to many many people. In particular, it is more alarming to hear that younger generations now grow up thinking that perhaps it is not wrong to steal, to bribe, to commit fraud or graft because these methods are a way of making sure that they can make progress in their careers or that they can enrich themselves. Therefore, it is necessary to help them understand the seriousness of corruption and the devastating effects it has on long-term development and their livelihoods. It should be seen as a “cancer” of any society.

In addition, to effectively prevent and suppress corruption, an awareness-raising campaign needs to be adopted and implemented widely, both by the youths and by adults. And what I think is particularly crucial in trying to raise awareness and instill the right balance is to have good examples in any society and also make sure that the philosophy guiding the nation is something that is conducive to integrity and good governance. In Thailand, we have been fortunate to have His Majesty the King provide us with wisdom through the Sufficiency Economy philosophy. I am not going to talk today about the economic implications of that but I will say that the Sufficiency Economy philosophy provides guidance in terms of how one is to live one’s life within one’s means and in moderation, which, in itself, is a very strong counter-incentive to corruption and illegal means of seeking self-enrichment or progress.

In Thailand, the government has pledged good governance in public affairs so as to suppress and prevent corruption and malfeasance. The government has also pledged to reform and amend outdated laws and regulations that are liable to abuse, the laws that promote conflict of interest and other forms of corrupt practices. Most importantly, we see the real need to cultivate the value of honesty among the Thai people, particularly the young generations.

There has, of course, been some progress in fighting corruption. And I quote the word of many counter corruption commissions as we have just heard from the President: “It has been long hard work.” But this deep-seated political or systemic corruption is still more difficult to tackle. One crucial factor that drives corruption in almost all societies is the link between money and politics, and the process to capture state institutions at the national and local levels by powerful interests. In these cases, traditional control mechanisms may need to be supplemented by more innovative ones to enhance transparency and accountability. These include closer monitoring by the international community and the engagement of wider sectors on the domestic front – namely the country’s financial sector, civil society organizations, as well as civic and professional groups. And in order to enable these groups to do just that we also need a good legal framework to make sure that there is freedom of information, so that people could have access to all the things that the public sector is engaged in.

The National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) of Thailand is entrusted to perform challenging tasks. It is not only there to investigate corruption cases, but also to strengthen the enabling environment and the national governance systems themselves. In this regard, I would like to express my appreciation to the NACC and its staff for their dedication and commitment in fulfilling this tough responsibility, and for doing their job with integrity.

Whatever the action or intention, sound policies need to be based on evidence; and sound evidence comes from good research. I am pleased that the NACC is thinking outside the box. It is not confining itself to day-to-day investigation, but is also building capacity through research and use of data – which is the theme of this very conference. I am also pleased to hear that the NACC’s Research Center is laying the foundation for it to be a regional center of knowledge on corruption research in the future. This conference moves the NACC forward in this new direction, and it is my hope that concrete outcomes for policy recommendations will result.

On the part of the government, I would like to emphasize that, in seriously pursuing its anti-corruption efforts within the country, it fully recognizes the importance of cooperation with the international community, as corruption is now regarded as one of the transnational crimes. In this regard, the Thai government has already signed the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) and is ready to join other parties in ratifying it as soon as all related laws are revised or enacted. I was informed that such laws have already been reviewed by the Council of State and are now under the consideration of the Parliament. Indeed, Thailand has regularly joined, and actively participated in, other international fora which deal with corruption. On this point, I am pleased to announce that last week the Cabinet resolved to approve the hosting of the 14th International Anti-Corruption Conference (IACC) in Bangkok in November of the year 2010. This Conference would help raise awareness and stimulate discussion, as well as foster exchanges of experiences and best practices in anti-corruption action both at the national and international levels.

My government is resolute in its commitment to the rule of law, and a just and moral society. While no one can eradicate corruption overnight, we can start our action against corruption by inculcating in our people, especially the young generations, the value and culture of honesty and self-respect. And in order to make sure that this effort will bear fruit, we

need to start at home, and extend thereon in our workplace, and national administration. It is also important to instill a sense of responsibility, accountability, and honesty in our people and make them aware that these values are actually part and parcel of human dignity.

Let me end by reiterating that corruption may date far back in the history of mankind. However, can be prevented or suppressed if everyone works together in close collaboration. And on this note, I would like to commend each of you for being here today to express your commitment to fight corruption and make our societies better.

I wish you every success in your deliberations.

Thank you very much.

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