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Statement

by

Mr. Chirachai Punkrasin,  
Ambassador and  
Deputy Permanent Representative of Thailand  
to the United Nations,

At the High Level Meeting Devoted to  
the Mid-term Review of  
the Almaty Programme of Action,

3 October 2008,  
General Assembly Hall,  
the United Nations, New York.

Mr. President,

This year marks two important mid points, one is the Millennium Development Goals and the other is the Almaty Programme of Action.

Last week, during the General Debate and during the High-level Meeting on MDGs, one of the issues mentioned many times is poverty eradication. This issue is very important and the United Nations had dedicated one round table meeting on this particular issue during the High Level Meeting on MDGs.

A number of perspectives to overcome poverty and hunger were raised during such meetings and one among many is **opportunity**. It is the opportunity to connect to the world and the opportunity to play a role in the global community.

It is clear that 'being provided with opportunity' would help developing countries, which are not yet on-track to achieve MDGs, to be able to eradicate poverty, ensure better livelihoods, and, thus, achieve MDGs by the target year of 2015. In this regard, the Global Partnership for Development has been highlighted as a mechanism to provide such opportunity.

Besides Africa, whose development needs were at the centre of discussion over the past few weeks, there are also the landlocked developing countries that deserve unabated attention from the international community about their special needs to ensure the realization of their opportunity and potential. As a neighbour of a landlocked developing country, we are well aware of the role which a transit country should play. Thus, we appreciate the efforts made by the Secretary-General to organize this high-level meeting to review the progress at the mid-point of the Almaty Programme of Action which, indeed, highlights the key role of partnership between landlocked and transit developing countries and other partners in creating opportunity and access to global market and connectivity.

Mr. President,

Thailand believes that opportunity is important for ensuring development and prosperity. Thus, Thailand has extended cooperation on transport linkages to its neighbouring countries, through regional, sub-regional, and bilateral cooperation, in line with the priorities set out in the Almaty Programme of Action.

On facilitating transit transport and eliminating non-physical barriers, we have provided special privilege to neighbouring countries by exempting customs on commercial goods which are transited through Thailand. Under the umbrella of ASEAN, member states have also worked on a number of agreements on transportation and communication, for example, the Framework Agreement on the Facilitation of Goods in Transit signed in 1998 and the Framework Agreement on Multi-modal Transport in 2005.

On building infrastructure, Thailand has placed great importance on the construction of transport links within the region under several regional and sub-regional cooperation. The network of transportation linkages will facilitate further regional integration in economic and social aspects that will ultimately nurture the greater sense of community among countries. At present, the Asian Highway Network has made great progress with the development of the East-West, North-South and Southern Economic Corridors under the Great Mekong Sub-region (GMS) framework. The Singapore-Kunming Rail Link (SKRL) under the ASEAN Mekong Basin Development Cooperation (AMBDC), once realized, will link the ASEAN members with China. Under the BIMSTEC, a study on development of transport infrastructure and logistics between South and Southeast Asia was conducted by the ADB to facilitate trade and transport across the Bay of Bengal.

During the 3rd GMS Summit in Laos, the Thai Prime Minister proposed initiatives of the tourism loops in order to boost economic activities through tourism by connecting historical and cultural heritages in the cities along the existing corridors in the Mekong Sub-Region. This route can complement to the existing tourist destinations in the ASEAN and those of IMT-GT area.

As the Economic Corridors under the GMS are due for completion in 2015, Thailand is of the view that it would be useful for the relevant member countries of sub-regional cooperation frameworks, such as ACMECS, GMS, BIMSTEC and IMT-GT, together with their development partners, to consider cooperation to identify and expedite “missing-link” projects that would complete or significantly enhance the transportation network not only within the greater Mekong sub-region but beyond, including South Asia and the whole of continental Southeast Asia.

Mr. President,

On the bilateral basis, Thailand has been providing financial assistance to Lao PDR, our landlocked neighbour, as well as Cambodia and Myanmar in projects that will help strengthen transport connectivity. However, I will confine myself in the role of Thailand as a transit country.

Thailand has provided financial assistance, both grants and soft loans, to Lao PDR for the construction of transport infrastructure. Up to now, our financial assistance to Lao PDR has reached 265 million US dollars.

On road developments, our assistance has been provided for building a road linking Huay Sai-Loung Num Tha in Lao PDR which is a part of Route 3 of the North-South Economic Corridor (NSEC) under the GMS framework. Currently, we are considering assistance to rehabilitate Route No. 11 in Vientiane, the Capital City.

On the development of Mekong Bridges, Thailand worked with Lao PDR in utilizing the JBIC loan to construct the Second Mekong Bridge (Mukdahan-Savannakhet). Thailand has also provided financial assistance to build the Third Mekong Bridge. In addition, Thailand will cooperate with China to build the Fourth Mekong Bridge (Chiang Khong-Huay Sai).

Apart from the progress made in road and bridge developments, Thailand plays an active role in strengthening other modes of connectivity with Lao PDR. We have contributed financial and expertise support for the development of a rail link from Nong Kai – Tha Na Lang which has already been completed in April 2007. Moreover, we have also offered a soft loan for the improvement of Pakse Airport Project. In addition, both sides are working on the consideration for the rehabilitation of Savannakhet Airport, which is a part of the EWEC project under GMS framework.

Mr. President,

Providing opportunity in term of linkages will directly create people-to-people contact, which would help them to have better accesses in economic and social dimensions and improve their livelihood as a whole. In addition, these linkages can have a role in bridging the development gap through the accessibility to global market. This would enable landlocked developing countries to gain more economic benefits from globalization, reduce poverty and achieve the MDGs.

On our part, Thailand will continue to actively support the development of transport links for the better living standards of the people in the Mekong sub-region. In the Asia-Pacific Region, Thailand appreciates the efforts made by UNESCAP, the regional arm of the United Nations, in connecting our members in the region together and making opportunity for larger market access possible. However, there is more to be done, and Thailand also wishes to urge other development partners to participate in transport connectivity development both in terms of technical and financial assistances relating to infrastructure development. Several programmes and projects still need more funding supports. Moreover, there are imperative needs to strengthen administration and management, and the sustainable infrastructure utilization taking into account the cost reduction, operation and maintenance, safety, and mitigation of social and environmental impacts as well as fair distribution of benefit to the people.

I thank you, Mr. President.