

Talking Points

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in Thailand

Launch of the Thailand Human Development Report 2009 **“Human Security, Today and Tomorrow”**

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His Excellency Issara Somchai, Minister of Social Development
and Human Security of Thailand
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It's my pleasure to introduce the 2009 Thailand Human Development Report. This Report is the culmination of months of hard work by many dedicated people and I thank them for their contribution.

The Thailand Human Development Report presents a broad and overarching theme of human security, a concept that was first introduced by the UNDP Global Human Development Report in 1994. It is defined as *'safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression. And protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life – whether in homes, in jobs or in communities'.*

It's true we think of safety when we think of security – safety for ourselves, for our loved ones, and for this great country. Yet, as

this report shows-human security is more than protecting what we have now. It's about sustaining and growing our collective resources so that it can be safeguarded for future generations. Human security also means having the ability to realize one's maximum potential, regardless of stature and status. It means people living in Thailand are free from want, fear and despair to live in dignity and enjoy freedom, justice and peace. Our report details how human security is multi-dimensional in this increasingly complex environment.

In the lead up to today's presentation, we held three major brainstorming sessions in April of 2008, with representatives from the Government, civil society, private sector and the academia. While a lot of issues were high on the list, we came to a consensus that human security was the most relevant, reflecting what's really on the minds of many Thai people. Since choosing the topic, a series of consultations have been held in various fora, including 4 regional consultations. A wide network of stakeholders, either as project board or advisory panel members, provided an overall direction of the report as well as comments on various stages of the draft. I should also draw your attention that a cut-off date of 31 December 2009 was set to place a clear timeframe and therefore the data you see in the Report is up to date as of the end of last year.

The report highlights today's risks and tomorrow's uncertainties, those undermining the tremendous progress Thailand has made in human development over the past few decades. They are highlighted so that they can be addressed properly and timely

before they seriously affect people's lives. (*pause*) But what does human security mean in Thailand?

When vegetables, sold by a small farmer, make their way to the local Bangkok food stalls, washed and used for your lunch at the food stand, you didn't know that the Ministry of Public Health found contamination in 44 percent of its sample of ready to-eat foods from stalls and supermarkets. Both the land we grow our food must be maintained and the water we use to wash our food must remain free of contaminants. *This is human security.*

There's no question that Thailand has had its share of economic crisis. The whole world has. Yet, for many of our loved ones who've lost their jobs, there's the minimal comfort of a social safety net. Unfortunately, not all of us are getting the help we need when it is really needed. Thailand has nearly two-thirds of its workforce employed in the "informal" sector. This means that a large number of people are vulnerable to economic insecurity. These workers are outside the protection of labour laws, excluded from social security, largely deprived of opportunities for training, and often receive "unfair" wages. As the Report indicates, the informal sector is huge—as much as 58 percent of the total workforce. We need to continue to lend a hand to people who work in the fields, who build our roads, and move our goods. *This is human security.*

It is a near-universal value among families that there is nothing more precious than our children. We want them to grow up and be good, upstanding members of society. It is an offense to all of us when children--through no fault of their own--are abducted into a

life of sexual servitude. Human trafficking is a modern form of slavery which has become a severe problem affecting not only Thailand but also the world community at large. As this report demonstrates, much has been done to combat human trafficking, thanks to the Royal Thai Government, particularly the Ministry of Social Development. But more work still remains. This is human security.

Thailand used to get lucky when it came to the rain. Not anymore. Now we must be smart with the water we've been given. It's no secret that Thailand is using more and more water every year. In just over 20 years, Bangkok's water demand increased fifteen times to 7.5 million cubic meters per day. (pause) And that was 15 years ago. Farming requires a large supply of water. So too does industrial and urban use. Despite our tropical climate, Thailand is at severe risk over the quantity of water. This is human security.

Human security means being aware of our consumption and its consequences. Human security requires that we think beyond the limited scope of ourselves and our families, to the needs of all people.

This Report puts the spotlight on issues facing families just like this. And the Report also makes recommendations, such as putting social imbalance, inequity and injustice on top of the national agenda. Prime Minister Abhisit, in his roadmap for reconciliation, acknowledged the need to resolve the 'fundamental problems of social injustice' as a way of promoting social cohesion and human security. It's time to confront the source of social

injustice and identify ways of addressing it. More importantly, it's time to translate the national priority agenda of social injustice into concrete action with the participation of all people living in Thailand. It's time for both leaders and ordinary citizens to commit themselves to make this a reality.

The Thailand Human Development Report also highlights groups ignored or by passed by this fast development--those affected the most by economic, social and environmental imbalances and insecurities. The richest Thais earn 14.7 times more than the poorest. The bottom 60% of the population's share of the income is only 25%. An average of 879 people living in urban areas compared to 5000 living in rural areas have access to only one doctor. Fewer than a million people, despite the high population, live under the poverty line in urban areas compared to more than 5 million in rural areas. Additionally, about 3.5 million people are stateless. Many of them face insecurities. They have uncertain access to the Thai judicial system, uneven access to health services and education, and because of their limited rights they are vulnerable to the worst kinds of exploitation and violence.

The question arises as to what it means to put human security on the national agenda and how to shrink social injustice and inequality. We have four concrete suggestions.

First, *allocate sufficient resources – financial, human and IT to address this priority agenda.* Second, *promote and cultivate core values* namely transparency, open dialogue and accessibility. More specifically, a more equitable society, a more open and

accessible government, and a more secure Thailand for all people living in the country. Third, accountable management, *having leaders at various levels to demonstrate results. Fourth, speedy and measurable implementation, showing visible and sustainable results.*

The broad divisions between urban and rural, the rich and the poor, the privileged and the deserving must shrink. Today's uncertainties and tomorrow's risks, with the implementation of recommendations on priority areas and actions, must be reduced, making the lives of the most vulnerable more endurable and safeguarding the level of human development for the population at large.

The Part II of the Report is on the **Human Achievement Index** which provides useful data on various aspects of human development in Thailand.

Today, Human Achievement index continues to be one of few development indices at the provincial level. The basic idea is that it follows a human's lifecycle, starting with the most fundamental human need – health and education, followed by employment, income, housing, environment all the way to the participation in policy decision making. It has also drawn attention to the patterns of geographical disparity, promoting the production and use of provincial-level data for development planning.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to take the opportunity to recognize some very distinguished people. The advisory panel is

composed of individuals and representatives from various sectors and organizations. A very special thank you to Khun Kanda, the Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, who provided an invaluable contribution during the preparation of the report. Professor Vitit also provided invaluable guidance in and out of the meetings.

In closing, this Report documents what we've known and what we've forgotten. It's a wakeup call for policymakers and civil society to address the fundamental cracks in society before they become large holes.

Please enjoy our panelists and the forthcoming discussion. We also welcome your comments.

Thank you.