

**Opening Speech by His Excellency Mr. Suwat Liptapanlop,
Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand,
at the Follow-up Meeting of
The ASEM Education and Research Hub for Lifelong Learning
Bangkok, 4 May 2006**

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**Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

First of all, I would like to welcome all of you to Thailand. I am indeed pleased to be here to address this Follow-up Meeting of the ASEM Education and Research Hub for Lifelong Learning. As you know, this year the Thai nation is celebrating the auspicious occasion of the 60th Anniversary of His Majesty the King's Accession to the Throne. For all of us, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej is a living example of Lifelong Learning. My presentation on "The Role of His Majesty the King on Lifelong Learning for Employability and Sustainability" therefore not only illustrates the importance of Lifelong Learning, but also pays tribute to His Majesty's tireless efforts for the Thai people.

Let me also congratulate all those involved in the ASEM Education and Research Hub for Lifelong Learning for this important initiative. This network indeed offers opportunities for strengthening cooperation between Asia and Europe through promotion of knowledge exchange and joint research between our two continents. Thailand places great importance on supporting ASEM activities, especially those aiming at increasing people-to-people exchanges. We have therefore played an active role in helping to promote the Hub from the very beginning, and we are pleased to see it gaining vigour.

We are enthusiastic about this initiative because we believe that education should not be confined to the classroom. Lifelong Learning means that education can be pursued through formal, non-formal, and informal means. The world is an endless learning place that can offer tremendous eye-opening experiences. Therefore, education needs to be made relevant to people's everyday lives, regardless of age, race, religion, or language. And by serving as a means to enhance one's quality of life and to prepare one for the challenges of globalisation, education promotes continuous adaptability, leading to sustainability. We firmly believe that countries need to nurture the talents of their citizens by encouraging Lifelong Learning to promote workforce development and drive the economy towards prosperity. We also view that Lifelong Learning can help promote active and responsible citizenship, which is an essential

foundation of democracy. However, it is by following the example of His Majesty the King that we have learnt the true value of Lifelong Learning.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

His Majesty the King is the archetypal lifelong learner. Throughout the 60 years of His Majesty's reign, the King has traveled through mountains, valleys, and coastlines to visit his people. And wherever he goes, he tries to improve their lives and solve their problems by learning about their living conditions and suggesting applicable solutions, with due respect to their beliefs and lifestyles.

Even though Thailand is blessed with an abundance of fertile land and plentiful water resources, deforestation and occasional extreme weather has meant that drought and flood can cause tremendous damage to people and their livelihoods, especially farmers who form the backbone of the country. The King has delved into these problems and searched for solutions through consultations with local people as well as the study of academic theories and practical applications.

In order to find a solution to the drought problem, His Majesty has since 1955 conducted extensive research on rainmaking and undertaken many experiments. The rainmaking project has progressed continuously, such that in 1999 the King published a collection of best practices and procedures for rainmaking for academics and practitioners. The "Royal Rain Development of an Atmospheric Water Source" project transforms clouds into rain, feeding lives that reside below. Moreover, the clouds are seeded in such a pattern as to concentrate rainfall over dams, which can then generate electricity for many more people in the cities.

With this and other innovations, King Bhumibol is the world's first and only monarch to hold a patent. The first was in 1993 for the Chaipattana Aerator he invented to treat waste water in a very simple but cost-effective and energy-efficient way. The King also holds several patents for his rainmaking projects: starting from the rainmaking patent in 1995; to a patent for "sandwich" rainmaking in 1999; and the "supersandwich" patent in 2004. As a great learner, researcher, practitioner, and inventor, the King is therefore truly a role model for us all in Lifelong Learning.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Besides his own experiments and research, His Majesty the King also encourages and assists others to pursue their education, Fully

realizing the importance of human resources development, His Majesty has been a pioneer in education. For education, even the most basic functional literacy, is the key to employability and quality of life of the people.

To this end, the King has established the “*Nawarirk* Fund” to assist poor children to obtain primary and secondary education, which is the most important part of one’s functional literacy. He has donated his personal funds to build schools within the temples in rural areas so that monks can serve as teachers where formal education establishments are either inaccessible or unaffordable. This model has the added benefit of bridging formal and moral education, which will foster future generations of quality citizens with knowledge and integrity.

The *Rom Klao* School is another interesting model of formal education that the King currently supports with his personal contributions. In remote districts or areas near the border, schools are built and classes taught by soldiers who are stationed there. This arrangement not only tackles the illiteracy problem in difficult-to-access and dangerous areas, but also helps to promote better understanding and builds trust between the soldiers and the local community.

The King has also established the Ananda Mahidol Foundation Scholarship in honour of his elder brother, the late King Ananda Mahidol, to assist Thailand’s best and brightest in pursuing their higher education abroad. The Ananda Mahidol Foundation Scholarship offers full assistance without any obligation, confident that these people will return to Thailand and bring back the knowledge attained through their studies to further the country’s development. And they have done so in their hundreds, spearheading important advances in their respective fields.

Meanwhile, as an innovator King Bhumibol has applied modern technology in his efforts to make education affordable and accessible to all. The “Distance Learning via Satellite” project, located at Klai Kangwon Palace, was first launched on 5 December 1995 to commemorate the King’s Golden Jubilee. The curriculum of Grade 7 to 12 is broadcast 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The educational services from this project reach over 3,000 schools and more than two million students around the country. Through the King’s magnanimity, these services also benefit all those in the Greater Mekong Subregion, namely China, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia. In addition, the “Distance Learning via Satellite” project offers university students hands-on experience in telecommunications and broadcasting, which would enhance their employability later in life.

At the same time, self-education has always remained at the heart of the King's philosophy on Lifelong Learning. Under His Majesty's guidance, the Thai Junior Encyclopedias are produced to compile knowledge of all sciences so that young people can learn on their own, according to different age groups. These books offer knowledge to those wishing to learn outside their classroom, and thus benefit those who do not have access to adequate educational facilities and qualified faculty.

In supporting non-formal education, His Majesty also initiated the *Phra Dabos* project in 1976. *Phra Dabos* are hermits in folktales who inhabit the forest and teach those who commit themselves to moral responsibility. And even though the modern world puts pressures on us to be competitive, there are those who willingly share their knowledge for altruistic reasons. This project provides facilities for those who want to share their knowledge, but have no means to establish a school of their own, to have the opportunity to teach and improve the lives of others. We have seen many learners who go on to support themselves with the practical knowledge gained from this project, such as in electronics.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With the majority of the Thai workforce engaged in farming, it is not too much to say that agriculture forms the backbone of Thailand's economy and society. And as the development of agriculture is essential to the country's overall development, this has naturally been a focus of His Majesty's efforts.

Let me give you one example of how the King's projects on agriculture have improved the lives of the people. In the case of the hill-tribes, in the past, it was very difficult for them to survive off the crops they grew. Many of them resorted to growing opium and other illegal substances, which commanded high prices. From the very beginning, His Majesty was therefore determined to tackle this problem. He began by conducting extensive research and experimentation on highland agriculture. He discovered that cash crops such as coffee, tea, fruits, legumes, and fast-growing trees could be efficiently grown in these areas with minimal impact on the surrounding environment. Since then, through the Royal Projects, His Majesty has worked tirelessly to encourage hill-tribes people to switch to cultivating these crops. As a result of his efforts, the hill-tribes are able to earn higher income through cash crops, afford their children's education, and improve their quality of life.

However, while encouraging agricultural development, His Majesty also recognizes the importance of encouraging sustainable development. In his own words, the King stresses that, *"It is not necessary to promote agricultural production only in terms of quantity because this may be a waste of production costs and destroy the soil quality."* Rather, His Majesty has encouraged sustainable development techniques such as using cattle instead of machines to plow the fields, and using a crop rotation system and natural fertilizers instead of expensive artificial fertilizers which could damage soil conditions over time.

One can indeed see that while His Majesty encourages people to adopt modern and sustainable farming techniques through the Royal Projects, he does not impose his theories on the people. Instead, he seeks to increase the people's understanding by encouraging them to learn by doing. In his own words, *"Agriculture which concerns the livelihood of the Thai farmers should emphasize real practice, rather than relying on textbooks."*

Nevertheless, because income from agriculture can be unstable depending on the conditions, His Majesty recognizes the importance of strengthening the ability of farmers to earn supplementary income through non-farm activities. This additional income, in turn, helps families to become self-supporting. Thus, the Royal Family has sponsored The Supplementary Occupations and Related Techniques Project, also known by its acronym as SUPPORT. More than 150 SUPPORT training centres have been set up throughout the country to provide training courses to farmers to make products such as traditional handicrafts, silverware and silk clothing. In so doing, in addition to giving farmers additional skills which they can apply to earn additional income, the SUPPORT programme also has the added benefit of promoting the nation's cultural heritage.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My presentation today will be unforgivably incomplete if I do not mention the King's "New Theory." A product of Lifelong Learning as it is based on his extensive research and experiences traveling around the country, a three-step process for agricultural practice has been formulated by His Majesty in order to help farmers achieve self-sufficiency.

The first step of the "New Theory" involves agricultural management at the household level. To address the apparently endemic poverty of the farmers, due in part to unpredictability of the weather and natural disasters, the King stresses diversification of economic activities.

This guards against unexpected catastrophes and gives households the ability to draw on multiple sources of income. At the same time, in-house outputs, such as fruits and vegetables, are actively promoted for consumption within the family in order to cut household expenses. This method of diversified cropping also nurtures the soils so as to yield higher productivity. The goal is that farmers can ultimately abandon chemical-ridden monoculture, which is damaging to an individual's health, environment, and long-term productivity. This will truly empower farmers to attain sustainable economic well-being.

After empowering the household, the King encourages the people to also strengthen their communities by forming cooperatives. Through such groupings, community members can help each other in other areas of production, such as training and marketing, and in social welfare. And as the final step, a strong community can engage the private sector in community development in the long run. Through the collective bargaining power of a strong community, farmers will no longer have to suffer from price manipulation by middle-men. His Majesty's "New Theory" thus holds out hope for families around the country to escape the vicious cycle of indebtedness and improve their living conditions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

His Majesty the King is the longest reigning monarch in the world. For over half a century, he has been working selflessly to improve the lives of Thai people. The royal initiatives I have cited here represent only a miniscule part of His Majesty's extensive works. Above all, the King has provided education to those who need it and want to acquire knowledge and skills in order to enhance their employability and quality of life through Lifelong Learning.

On the auspicious occasion of the 60th Anniversary of His Majesty's Accession to the Throne, it has been my privilege to present to you His Majesty's path in pursuing sustainable development through Lifelong Learning. Indeed, Lifelong Learning is a challenge for all of us in the globalised world. Learning and adaptation to manage change has never been more essential. This is why the ASEM Hub holds such great potential in promoting the exchange of knowledge and ideas from Asia and Europe so that we become learning societies. Fortified with this collaboration and strategic partnership, we can make a difference and create a better world for the younger generation.

Thank you.
