

**Welcome Remarks by Ambassador Nopadol Gunavibool at  
The Thailand-Belgium Business Forum: “One Year After”  
On Wednesday 4 June 2014 from 15.00-19.00 hrs.  
at the Federation of Enterprises in Belgium**

Deputy Secretary General Duangjai Asawachintachit,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the first meeting of the Thailand-Belgium Business Forum: “One Year After.” This is a good opportunity for us to meet one year after the Economic Mission to Thailand led by then Crown Prince Philippe in March last year. I am sure many of you are concerned about events taking place in Thailand and would like to know what is going on.

As you are all aware, the **prolonged political deadlock and the administrative paralysis have been detrimental to Thailand**. Normal daily lives were disrupted by rallies and demonstrations, while government agencies were unable to perform their duties effectively.

**Had Thailand continued on the path we were heading, it would have led to more instability, protracted conflicts and divisiveness**. Furthermore, it would have undermined the effectiveness of the ASEAN community and its economy.

Given the situation, the military was **compelled to take control** of national administration in order to **provide a cooling-off period** for all sides, and to prevent further deterioration of the situation. The invocation of martial Law by the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) is intended **to prevent further violence, restore stability, and put the country back on track towards full democracy**.

With regard to that goal, **the NCPO reaffirms that individual rights and freedoms are to be upheld.** The limitations that have been put in place are only those necessary to prevent further disruption and pre-empt efforts to instigate violent incidents.

The priority of the NCPO is to **ensure that national administration functions as normal and key policies can be implemented.**

The NCPO has pledged to protect all diplomatic missions, consulates, international organizations, as well as all tourists and foreign nationals residing in Thailand. The Council has reaffirmed that all diplomatic relations between the Kingdom of Thailand and foreign nations remain unchanged from their status under the previous government. All on-going negotiations will also be carried out as planned. Thailand's commitment under various international obligations will be respected.

Given the interconnection of our globalized world, no country can take an isolationistic approach any more – and Thailand is no exception. Thailand intends to continue our proactive foreign policy, especially in ASEAN, the United Nations and other multilateral fora. The Council is working towards returning the situation to normalcy as soon as possible so that Thailand can return to proactive and mutually beneficial relationships with our international friends and partners.

It is the Council's intention to create the right conditions for national reconciliation and push forward the reform process, in order to put Thailand on a path towards free and fair elections and restore democracy once again.

It will take time for effective administration and social harmony to be restored to Thailand. The Council has pledged to return the situation to normal as soon as possible, and to ensure long term stability for both Thailand and the region.

On Friday the thirtieth (30) of May, General Prayut Chan-O-Cha, the head of the Council, outlined the Council's roadmap in the following three phases.

The first phase will involve efforts to achieve national reconciliation as soon as possible, at least within two to three months. In addition to security operations, a reconciliation center will be established for central and rural reforms paving the way for the second phase.

In the second phase, a legislative council will be established to select an interim Prime Minister, appoint cabinet members to administer the country, and draft a new constitution. A reform council will also be established to resolve existing conflicts. This will probably take approximately one year.

When the situation returns to normal and national reconciliation and social harmony have been achieved, the Council will move to the third and final phase of organizing a general election under a democratic system which is legal and accepted by all sides.

Undoubtedly, there will be economic repercussions from the military intervention. However, I think you all understand Thailand very well and know that an event like this is separate from the economic dynamics in Thailand. Elected and non-elected governments come and go, but our economic policy has never changed.

Throughout the long process of political change and maturity to a democracy, the Thai economy has always remained open to foreign investment and trade. The Thai government has always done its utmost to protect foreign businesses and your investments in Thailand and this will never change.

The Council has appointed recognized economic experts to a 10 member advisory board on economic affairs. Members include Somkid Jatusripitak, former finance minister and deputy prime minister, MR Pridiyathorn Devakul, former deputy prime minister, and Narongchai Akrasanee, former commerce minister, who are all known for their economic skills and experience.

An economic roadmap is expected to be announced this week to restart economic activities which were stopped or slowed down in recent months. Projects aimed at enhancing people's livelihood and well-being will be expedited. Priorities include the disbursement of money to all farmers left unpaid from the rice-pledging scheme and the investments on connectivity infrastructure projects such as in flood prevention and mass transit.

For the rest of the 2014 fiscal year, which ends on 30 September, the Council places priority on the following projects:

(1) projects delayed by the political vacuum that have a direct impact on the economy, especially those affecting the basic needs of the people, such as the rice-pledging scheme;

(2) projects that have been approved but could not be carried out due to the legal constraints experienced by the previous government; and

(3) mega projects that require special budget, such as the dual-track train project, electric train project, and other public infrastructure projects.

The Thai Chamber of Commerce, the Federation of Thai Industries and the Board of Trade have all expressed their support of initial details of the roadmap and said that it could help bolster the economy and stimulate growth.

Our history has shown time and again that Thailand is quick to adapt to political and economic changes. This time is no different, so do not worry. Please do not hesitate if you want to invest and trade. Thailand's economic fundamentals are still strong with a low unemployment rate (*0.7% in Q4 2013*), and private investment and domestic consumption are expected to rebound quickly.

Let me just mention some highlights about bilateral relations between Thailand and Belgium.

Thailand and Belgium have enjoyed very warm and close ties for the past 146 years since our two countries signed a Treaty of Friendship and Commerce in 1868. Our two Royal Families are very close, and HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn regularly visits Queen Fabiola every year.

At the political level, we have a Joint Plan of Action which was followed-up by the First Thailand-Belgium Policy Consultation between our two Ministries of Foreign Affairs in last November.

In fact, today's Forum is a concrete outcome of discussions during the Policy Consultation. Later this month, we will organize the First Thailand-Belgium Energy Dialogue in Brussels, another concrete cooperation between our two countries.

At the people to people level, the number of Belgian tourists to Thailand surpassed 100,000 people for the first time in 2013, or an increase of 6.55% from 2012. This increasing trend looks set to continue with 36,910 Belgian tourists visiting Thailand during January-April 2014, or an increase of 4.92% from the same period last year.

The Embassy has also planned several projects in 2014 to foster and nurture closer contact at the people-to-people level, such as, the Executive Visitor's Program to bring high-level government officials and prominent members of the private sector to Thailand to meet with their counterparts and experience Thailand first hand.

And of course, the annual "Essence of Thailand" food and cultural festival which is now in its 9<sup>th</sup> consecutive year at Place Dumon, Woluwe-Saint-Pierre. I hope you can join us this year on Sunday 31 August 2014.

Before I hand the floor over to Deputy Secretary General Duangjai, I would like to thank you all for your understanding and continued confidence in Thailand. Businessmen know where the money is. The fact that you are here shows that you know where the money is.

Thank you.

---