

*Check against delivery*

## **Keynote Address**

**By**

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*At*

**ASEAN-China-UNDP Symposium on Financing the  
Implementation of the SDGs in ASEAN**

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**Your Excellency Vongthep Arthakaivavatee, Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community**

**Your Excellency, Mr. Haoliang Xu, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General and UNDP Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific**

**Counsellor Ke Yousheng, representing H.E. Xu Bu, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to ASEAN**

**M.R. Disnadda Diskul, Chairman of the Board of the Mae Fah Luang Foundation under the Royal Patronage**

*Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

It is a distinct honour and pleasure for me to be with all of you in the majestic and charming province of Chiang Rai. Known for its strategic location where the borders of Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Southern China connect, Chiang Rai not only provides a perfect backdrop to our meeting here today, but also symbolizes a common bond between ASEAN and China as seen through their long standing dialogue

partnership, cooperation and exchange.

At the outset, I would like to thank the ASEAN Secretariat, the Mission of the People's Republic of China to ASEAN and the UNDP for inviting me to be the keynote speaker at this very timely symposium on financing for the implementation of the SDGs in ASEAN. Timely because as we celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ASEAN this year, we need to reflect on how far we have come in our integration journey, while at the same time, renew our commitment toward building a truly people-oriented, people-centred ASEAN Community.

As I look out over the audience gathered here to day, I am reminded of what the late Martin Luther King, Jr. said to a large gathering of young people in Washington, D.C. -- "I see today a lot of people, but only one face -- the face of the future."

Sustainable development has become a call of the future for our generation and generations to come.

With its adoption at the 70<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly in New York in 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, or the SDGs, has established its consensus status as the main vehicle that addresses the issues of poverty, prosperity and peace, while transforming the quality of our people and planet.

Likewise, ASEAN as an active and important regional grouping and a steadfast member of the international community stands firmly behind this noble goal. In fact, the theme of the 2017 Philippines Chairmanship sums up best where it says: “*partnering for change, engaging the world*”. Indeed, the development of the ASEAN Vision 2025 and its three Blueprints had been informed and influenced in a mutually reinforcing manner by the SDGs and its concept of ‘*Leave No One Behind*’.

ASEAN has always embraced sustainable development. The Joint Declaration on the Attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in ASEAN issued in Cha-am in 2009 proclaims that ASEAN

will ensure a continuous effort towards a balance between economic growth and social development and environmental sustainability in order to reduce and not to create negative impacts to the attainment of the MDGs.

I am pleased to learn that this ASEAN-China-UNDP symposium is a follow-up to the previous meeting held in Jakarta in 2016 aimed at socializing the SDGs among ASEAN stakeholders for the first time. I was intrigued to hear DSG Vongthep saying that “*no one wants to leave behind the ‘Leave No One Behind’ Symposium*”. This speaks volumes about the success of the 2016 meeting, as well as the outpouring of interest to engage in the dialogue on SDGs in our region.

So now, building on the outcomes and momentum of that Symposium, we meet here today. I congratulate the organizers for bringing participants to visit Doi Tung to exchange ideas on the SDGs and ASEAN Vision 2025 with the local people directly yesterday. This gives a true meaning to the idea of “*Thinking Globally, Acting Locally*”.

When I first heard the phrase “*financing the implementation of the SDGs in ASEAN*”, what came immediately to my mind is the most important resource that ASEAN possesses: its people. If you ask me how to finance the SDGs in ASEAN, I would prioritize on the importance of financing for the development of the people of ASEAN. Why? Because ASEAN has no more valuable resource than its own people to implement the SDGs. It is the people of ASEAN that will make the implementation of SDGs a success. Success in developing the human resources has proved to be key component to sustainable development in every ASEAN Member State. That is why the Leaders of ASEAN, through the ASEAN Charter, set out the purposes of ASEAN in particular to develop human resources through closer cooperation in education and life-long learning, in science and technology, for the empowerment of the peoples of ASEAN and for strengthening of the ASEAN Community.

We need to ensure that education is well-funded so that our next generations will be equipped with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills amidst the advent of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. We need to ensure that no one is left behind in the world of virtual connectivity and disruptive technology.

While we are here in Chiang Rai, it is appropriate to pay homage to the remarkable work of the late His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, King Rama IX of Thailand and the work of HRH Princess Srinagarindra, the late Mother of the late King Rama IX, who initiated the sustainable and alternative livelihood development for the people of Doi Tung and many mountain areas in the Northern part of Thailand.

Through the development of human resources in underprivileged areas and with it, the empowerment of the people and their community, the Doi Tung model has shown us that human resource development is the key to realizing sustainable development.

Experiences from Thailand in carrying out His Majesty the late King's "*Sufficiency Economy Philosophy*" have shown that undertaking development programming should be a reasonable and moderate exercise. As ever, the vision of His Majesty the late King's "*Sufficiency Economy Philosophy*" precedes the concerns for a strong financing strategy. In line with the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, we should strike a balance between being ambitious enough to inspire the pursuit of the Post-2015 development agenda and doable, deliverable and feasible projects when executed on the ground. Coupled with local wisdom and ingenuity, such effort must aim at building communities and their immunity against harmful fluctuations.

The lesson learnt is that we have to make sure people can stand on their own feet in making a living while preserving the nature and resources for future generations. Policy intervention and action on sustainable development are to improve the quality of life of the people, especially of those in poverty and those deprived of opportunities while fostering co-existence between humans and Mother Nature. They enable



and catalyze the growth of sustainable economic, social, cultural and environmental development. The people are to be placed at the centre of all policy intervention and action and are to be heard, engaged and consulted. That is the true essence of sustainability; this is the main ingredient for the implementation of the SDGs in real terms.

In parallel, and mindful of the philosophical backdrop, financing the ASEAN Vision 2025 and the SDGs will require identifying, attracting and putting together huge amounts of investment. ASEAN, like any other regional groupings, has limited resources and has to optimize them. A good financing strategy in ASEAN would make use of all the existing and innovative resources such as domestic or international financing, private or public.

We have heard from Mr. Haloing Xu, United Nations ASG that the sources of finance for ASEAN's development have increased significantly and that domestic resources provide the foundations for our achievement of Agenda 2030. We heard from UNDP's

research how domestic public and private resources are growing most rapidly, each increasing by around \$200 billion between 2007 and 2015.

Domestically, all ASEAN economic and trade agreements and frameworks are to be fully realized, amplified and buttressed by its economic outreach including through the expected conclusion of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). The establishment of the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB) and China's ambitious undertaking with the One Belt One Road Initiative (OBOR) will have an important role in enhancing the international financial architecture and global partnership for development.

Let us not forget that preserving economic gains is as equally important as the process of economic development itself. For example, we all know that ASEAN is one of the most disaster-prone regions in the world. Insurance, and in this case disaster and climate risk

financial insurance schemes will be very critical to help mitigate the negative impacts of such risks including through public policy development at both regional and national levels, and on knowledge management and capacity building.

Financing for the implementation of the SDGs is not a matter of solely finding funds, not just a matter of the quantity of finance available but also about the ways in which we channel that finance and ensure that it is supporting investments that support social and environmental goals as well as economic ones. In essence it is about how money is spent to strengthen people empowerment and community resilience.

How can it be done? Always refer to the people. People empowerment can be strengthened through promoting a healthy lifestyle of the people, which is free from all hazards and emerging health threats, protected from disasters and enabling environment for universal health coverage. We must aim toward building community resilience, as this will put the people first, protect them from negative consequences of natural disasters and humanitarian crises, and equip them with capacity to

collectively respond and adapt to current challenges and emerging threats.

The private sector is also an important source of knowledge, innovation, resources and funding for the implementation of the SDGs. Their role is important in facilitating innovation and forging awareness, buy-in and popularizing the SDGs.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

At the policy and strategy level, the ASEAN Vision 2025 is crafted to declare to the world that the people of ASEAN are committed to building an integrated, peaceful and stable community with shared prosperity. This noble objective buttresses the letter and the spirit of the SDGs.

In declaring the ASEAN Vision 2025, ASEAN Leaders recognized the importance of creating synergy and complementarities between the three Blueprints of ASEAN and the SDGs. Strong political commitment at the highest level in ASEAN has enabled an environment where the

ASEAN Vision 2025 and SDGs emphasize and complement each other's qualities, with the same aim of improving the lives and well-being of peoples.

ASEAN, under the leadership of Thailand as the Country Coordinator for SDGs in ASEAN, has embarked on high-level action to promote the so-called “Complementarities Initiative”. This will go a long way in galvanizing national actions within ASEAN Member States so as to achieve progress on both fronts in a cross-cutting and mutually reinforcing manner.

In promoting complementarities, ASEAN should provide added value in contributing to sustainable development efforts at the national and global levels, while bearing in mind resource constraints and the need to avoid duplication of efforts. As such, ASEAN needs to identify a clear timeline and priority areas in implementing activities to enhance complementarities, as well as best practices of SDGs Implementation so as to ensure their attainment throughout the region, and in turn, accelerate the achievement of the global agenda.

Initiatives to promote complementarities are needed since this is not business as usual. Initiatives that can sew up missing links among existing frameworks and mechanisms, that can create synergies between the two so that the sum of 2 and 2 is more than 4, and that can enable an environment for complementarity.

I am glad to see this series of symposium from 2016 till today and in the future, a “Culture of Prevention”, an ambitious programme being introduced by DSG Vongthep and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. This initiative will go a long way in addressing the root causes of violent extremism and other forms of violence and dysfunctional behaviour towards a peaceful, inclusive, resilient, healthy and harmonious society in ASEAN. Because at the end of the day, it is the lack of sustainable development that constitutes the root causes of these social ills. We need to promote development together with peace, human rights, justice and the rule of law. This new chapter of prevention culture in ASEAN will certainly complement UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres’s new prevention agenda.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

As Goal 17 of the SDGs calls for strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, including mobilizing additional financial resources for developing countries from multiple sources, the international community and partners of ASEAN can contribute to supporting ASEAN in financing for development. This is in line with goals of Vision 2025, the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint and thematic priorities under the ASEAN 2017 Chairmanship of the Philippines “*ASEAN: A model of regionalism, a global player*”.

Productive partnership between ASEAN, China and the UNDP in financing the implementation of the SDGs in ASEAN will help bring about more integrated national financing frameworks for leveraging and managing finance for sustainable development going forward.

If we are looking for a People's community in the ASEAN Community, it certainly is the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community.

The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community pillar is the prime mover in ensuring the ASEAN Community that is engaged, inclusive, sustainable, resilient and dynamic, as proclaimed in the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint. The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community is a prime mover of human resources development in ASEAN.

The presence of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community is omnipresent, integral and central to the building of the ASCC. ASEAN's socio-cultural portfolio is so diverse that its branding may not adequately capture its actual scope. While the social part deals with social welfare, poverty eradication, rights of women and children, education, youth and sports, health, labor and civil service, the cultural part deals with culture, art and information. Additionally, this pillar also covers environment, climate change, disaster management and humanitarian assistance.



Complementing and backstopping the work of political-security and economic pillars, the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community pillar focuses on the people, on improving the quality of life of ASEAN peoples and promoting the vast human potentials through sustainable development activities.

A people-centred, people-oriented ASEAN will require the effective service of a highly professional and dedicated ASEAN Secretariat. Though small if we compare it with the European Commission, the number of highly qualified staff who makes up of the ASEAN Secretariat is the nerve center of a strong and confident ASEAN Community that is globally respected. They support the ASEAN Member States in carrying out community frameworks and projects, including on-going undertakings to promote complementarities between ASEAN Vision 2025 and the SDGs.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

In declaring the ASEAN Vision 2025, ASEAN Leaders “*underline the complementarity of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with ASEAN community building efforts to uplift the standards of living of our peoples.*”

In declaring the new global Sustainable Development Goals, the Heads of State and Government and High Representatives, meeting at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 25 to 27 September 2015 “*envisage a world free of poverty, hunger, disease and want, where all life can thrive. We envisage a world free of fear and violence. A world with universal literacy. A world with equitable and universal access to quality education at all levels, to health care and social protection, where physical, mental and social well-being are assured.*”

The two quotes above build and complement perfectly on each other. Let us work together to enable an environment that barriers for development are removed, innovative financing policies and approaches are formulated and applied, and complementarities between regional

work programs and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are leveraged on.

Let us also work closely together to further unlock the potential of regional groupings to achieving the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and for it to contribute back to regional integration and development. ASEAN is about the future of our next generations. Let us reach out to all stakeholders and design together the future that we want.

With that note, I conclude my Keynote Address and I look forward to fruitful exchanges of ideas at our meeting today.

Thank you all very much for your attention.