Keynote Address

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TIJ Public Forum on Rule of Law and Sustainable Development: Understanding the Legacy of H.M. King Bhumipol Adulyadej
Monday, 17 July 2017, Dusit Thani Hotel, Bangkok

Her Royal Highness Princess Bhajratkitiyabha Mahidol [pat-cha-ra-ki-ti-ya-pa],
Mr. Suwapan Tanyuwattana, Minister of Justice,
Dr. Kittipong Kittiyarak, Executive Director of Thailand Institute of Justice,
Friends, Colleagues, Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning.

It is an honour to give this address on behalf of the United Nations Development Programme in Thailand at this forum today.

At the outset, allow me to extend my appreciation to TIJ for organising this third public forum on the topic of rule of law and sustainable development. This series of forums provides an important platform for useful discussions and exchanges of views on various issues surrounding the linkages between justice and development and helps contribute to the expansion of the body of knowledge which we, as practitioners, academics, as well as people from public and private sectors, can draw upon as we work to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

[Point 1: RoL&SD are interrelated and mutually reinforcing]

It has been widely established at the global level that the rule of law forms an integral part of our endeavour to achieve the SDGs.

As reflected in the Declaration of the High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Rule of Law in 2012, UN member states noted that the rule of law and sustainable development are not only strongly linked but also mutually reinforcing.

The advancement of the rule of law at all levels is indeed critical for sustained and inclusive economic growth, realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and sustainable development, all of which in turn will further reinforce rule of law.
To put it simply, an effective rule of law provides an enabling condition in which people can be assured that social and economic development will be inclusive and equitable. In turn, inclusive development provides the fundamental means of livelihood which will allow the rule of law to flourish further.

The recognition by member states of the significant linkages between the rule of law and sustainable development was further highlighted by their demand for the post-2015 international development agenda to consider the interrelationship of the two concepts.¹

This demand lead to the rule of law holding a prominent place in the new global development agenda which it has so long deserved, through Goal number 16 – which acknowledges that peaceful societies, access to justice, as well as rule of law and the accountable and inclusive institutions are all important constituents of sustainable development.

One may even liken rule of law to the ‘the golden thread’ which weaves through the SDGs, forming vital underpinning conditions to enable the progress on the other areas of development, making SDG16 a key transformative goal, an enabler of all the SDGs if you like.

[Point 2: HM’s legacy on development]

Working in the development field in Thailand, it is difficult to not be inspired by His Majesty the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej’s commitment to sustainable development. One only needs to turn to the countless photos of His Majesty with his trademark camera around his neck and a map under his arms to see a humble individual reaching out to his people and considering their needs.

And as you all know, in recognition of His Majesty’s lifelong commitment to development, he was awarded the first-ever UNDP Human Development Lifetime Achievement award in 2006.

With more than 4,300 royal development projects across Thailand in areas ranging from water resource management, and agriculture, to public health, His Majesty’s initiatives have not only improved the livelihoods of many people in Thailand but also, in many ways, laid a firm foundation for the advancement of the global agenda on sustainable development in Thailand today. His Majesty’s early focus on development insights such as water management and

conservation as well as emphasis on principle of resilience has only recently become mainstream issues globally through the SDGs and Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. One might say that sustainable development is already part of the DNA of the Thai people.

We can find in His Majesty’s approach to development an interplay between principles of rule of law and sustainable development at work. Many of his development projects, for instance, contain elements such as empowerment of the marginalised and disenfranchised as well as people’s agency over livelihood decision-making.

Indeed, development is undermined when people are disempowered and unable to express their views and participate in making decisions which will affect their lives. The lack of people’s agency and ownership will also undermine the society’s abilities to achieve development which is long-lasting and sustainable.

The effective rule of law, therefore, is a crucial ingredient in advancing development because it provides assurance to the people that actions undertaken by institutions will contribute to equitable and inclusive development growth.

**Point 3: Thailand’s commitment to SDGs**

The Thai government has been active in promoting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, starting with a very active role in the negotiations at the UN, leading up to the Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015 in New York.

During its chairmanship of G77 last year, Thailand also demonstrated its commitment in pushing for effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda through the government’s key theme: the SEP for SDGs, an approach which is influenced by none other than His Majesty the Late King and his Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. His Majesty’s development vision certainly serves as a useful approach to sustainable development. The deep reverence of the Thai people for the late King stands as one of the important drivers of the development commitment and efforts in Thailand.

We are pleased to see Thailand take such great strides in supporting the SDGs. Certainly, the fact that we are here today demonstrates the commitment that we all share specifically for the transformational goal of SDG16, and our recognition that the rule of law, peace, justice, and inclusive institutions are key to advancing sustainable development. The Thailand Institute of Justice plays a crucial role and has been very active in advocating for the strengthening of rule
of law in connection to this goal. To that end, UNDP in Thailand looks forward to expanding our collaboration with TIJ in this area in the future.

In further support of this, UNDP’s work in Thailand focuses on engaging in a mutual exchange of knowledge and expertise with the Thai government, civil society organisations, private sector and academic institutions on finding lasting solutions to development challenges. We also contribute to strengthening the rule of law, participatory democracy, and good governance by supporting the Thai government on policy advocacy on several issues ranging from public procurement reform and disaster risk reduction, to gender equality and social enterprise promotion. As a brand new example of this, I am very proud to be working with the Tourism Authority of Thailand to promote sustainable tourism in areas close to His Majesty’s royal development projects in our latest bid to improve the livelihoods of communities and advance human development in Thailand.

We hope that this important policy and legislative partnership will continue and be strengthened, creating an enabling legal environment for all sections of Thai society to do their part in achieving the SDGs, including strengthened rule of law and a legislative environment conducive for crucial private sector investment in sustainability to improve the way they do business, both from a social, environmental and human rights perspective.

On this last note, let me add too that the entire UN in Thailand hopes to support Thailand’s effort and commitment to sustainable development goals through collaboration with the UN system under the United Nations Partnership Agreement Framework or UNPAF for 2017-2021, which I am happy to report has been endorsed by the cabinet only last week. We look forward to working with the government, academia, civil society, and the private sector to ensure that the implementation of the SDGs bring about inclusive development to all people in Thailand and leaving no one behind.