**From the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy to Sustainable Development Goals December 21, 2018**

Good evening to you all.

As the long holiday season is approaching and everyone will be celebrating the New Year, I would like to convey the best wishes and blessings of His Holiness the Supreme Patriarch to everyone in Thailand, regardless of their religions and ethnic background.

There is a Buddhist teaching that says “patience is a source of happiness.” Those who follow this teaching will be blessed with strong mentality, determination, and commitment to overcome all obstacles in life. They will eventually find peace, happiness, success, and prosperity. I hope this happens to everyone.

On this auspicious occasion, the Government would like to invite you all to take part in the cross year prayer ceremony to welcome the New Year. Prayer sessions will be held from December 29th to January 1st at every monastery and other appropriated venues in Thailand

We will devote our deeds to the Thai monarchy, His Majesty the King, and all members of the Royal Family. Members of the public are encouraged to uphold precepts, practice Dhamma, and chant prayers. I hope this activity will inspire people to refrain from all forms of evil during New Year festivities.

This blissful night, I’d would like to start my speech with good news and activities that are happening and have happened throughout this past week.

First of all, let me congratulate and praise students from Wat Suthiwararam School for talking a Chinese tourist out of committing suicide by jumping off a bridge. They were able to calm down the tourist through communication and body language, helping the suicidal relax and give up on suicide attempt. The students are true heroes and gentlemen, equipped with life skills.

Their observation skills allowed them to notice something was wrong. They might have forgotten Chinese they learned in class, but when it came to saving a life, they were able to pull through. Their action is commendable.

Their heroic action has brought fame and impression to all tourists. This little incident can impact the nation in a big way, reflecting Thailand and Thai people’s warm hearts. I believe this will have a positive effect on trade and investment, as well as the tourism industry.

Thailand has set a goal to welcome 30 million foreign tourists on a yearly basis, one third of which are Chinese nationals. According to the latest statistical data, Thailand has been visited by more than 10 million foreigners this year, an increase of 5-7% year on year, generating up to 590 billion baht or an increase of 10-12%.

Most of them are repeat visitors who have had good experience with Thailand, the land of happiness. I’m most grateful that Thailand can warm the hearts of foreign tourists, making them feel at home. Being a good host and the ability to speak Chinese and English will certainly improve the country’s tourism image.

Another matter that I think can relate to this topic is the world beauty pageant. Nicolene Pichapa Limsnukan, Miss Thailand World 2018, who was the first runner-up in Miss World contest. She was truly beautiful inside and out. Her iconic beauty and talent are second to none.

Nicolene gave Thailand a platform to cement its beautiful image and was able to impress the world in the Thai way. In the meantime, Sophida "Ning" Kanchanarin was able to make it to the top 10 in Miss Universe 2018, which is also very impressive and commendable.

In addition, I’d like to applaud those behind this great success, especially Khampee Alangkarn, a Thai designer, who designed a costume inspired by the Kinnaree for the Lao contestant, which led to Laos winning the best national costume for the first time in the Miss Universe contest.

Let me express my appreciation to everyone behind the organizing of Miss Universe 2018, showing the world our best traits such as the “Wai” greeting, cultural and natural attractions, and traditional Thai costumes worn by the contestants while visiting “Love and Warmth at Winter's End, the River of Rattanakosin” organized at the initiation of His Majesty the King.

The organizing of the winter festival is as successful as Miss Universe 2018. We are able to convey our images and values through Miss Universe contestants and how they greeted billons of people around the world with the Thai “Wai” coupled with friendly smiles.

Miss Universe 2018 contestants from 95 countries were treated with Thai foods which they took a liking to. Many flavourful dishes served were Pad Thai, Panang Curry, tropical fruits, and mangoes with glutinous sweet rice which has been selected to in top 50 most delicious desserts in the world by CNN. Mock pomegranate seeds in coconut syrup is also selected to be on this list. We can all take pride in this.

Beloved citizens, as you can see from what I have just mentioned, Thailand has a number of good things to offer such as our own characteristic, the “Wai” tradition, Siam smiles, tourist attractions, foods, and traditional clothes, all of which are cultural products that can create added-value, jobs, income, and stability to local communities if promoted and managed in the right way. Public security is also an important key in this area.

Let me give you an example of a project by the communication reform subcommittee called “Build Thailand Together” initiated in response to the Government policy to move the country forward with public participation, focusing on strengthening the country from the community level.

The heart of the reform is to address poverty, social inequality, corruption, public administration, public participation, and future building. The messages that we have been sending to everyone in the country.

We have received great cooperation from many celebrities from several organizations. They have helped spreading the news on reform activities as well as projects that were designed to focus on the poor and the underprivileged.

Their communication platform is the “Thailand Moves Forward” program which airs every Saturday. I’m most grateful for their cooperation. The program is one of the main communication channels. This is the show that I would like to recommend you to follow. This program is aired at 6 pm.

The Government has started another project called “Community Arts” focusing on cultivating a sense of involvement through art works. Art is likened to a cultural capital that can be augmented for commercial purposes and for community tourism. The idea is to create 2 benefits from 2 activities.

The first activity is “Show & Share for Reform Public Forum” which is a platform for members of Thai communities to contribute their ideas on the strengths and selling points that are centered on cultural, natural, and community values. The forum is open to children and youth, women, the disabled, religious leaders, community leaders, village sages, organizations, and businesses.

They will be given an opportunity to voice their opinions for the development and reform of public policies to help forming public policies that answers different needs of different communities in accordance with the Royal Philosophy i.e. strength from within.

The second activity is “Community Based Arts for Reform Together” which provides members of Thai communities a chance to take part in creating community art pieces on a public platform. The activity will be launched in cooperation with educational institutions, local artists, and national artists.

Opinions and thoughts shared through this activity will be analyzed and decoded by the artists to create masterpieces that reflect the values of respective communities. Everyone will be involved in the process, thus developing a sense of belonging.

Most importantly, this activity will mirror the uniqueness of contemporary arts of each region, providing truly beautiful artworks.

This will be a historic milestone in Thai arts and culture, as it allows communities to be a part of art creations through every step of the way under the theme “Let’s Build Thailand Together.”

The Government will then work with local administrative organizations in expanding the project and incorporating it into long-term development plans, aiming to build more values to community-based arts and bolstering local economies through community tourism, Pracharat Market, walking streets, and tourism routes, which will in turn create employment, income, and sustainability while at the same time protecting Thai arts, culture, and local wisdom because they are valuable assets and heritage of Thailand.

The program has been introduced in 31 areas, 22 provinces throughout Thailand – Chiang Mai and Lamphun in the north, Bangkok Kanchanaburi, and Singburi in the central region, Kalasin and Maha Sarakham in the northeast, and Phuket, Songkhla, and Krabi in the south.

People can follow this campaign and learn more about it on “Reform Together” page on Facebook. Channel 5, Channel 9, NBT which is operated by the Public Relations Department, and Thai PBS. They will be covering related activities and giving you updates on this project. They will be presenting it from different angles. Their cooperation is much appreciated.

Dear brothers and sisters, in the past 30 - 40 years, Thailand has been recognized as one of the continually successful countries in terms of development. We have been able to transcend from being a low income country to becoming a middle income country, ever since the 3rd National Economic and Social Development Plan.

Every Government has focused on driving the economy of the country with a policy of distributing wealth to rural areas, increasing agricultural productivity, industrial development, value creation, and sustainable management of the environment.

This has helped grow the economy, increase the average income of the people, and reduce the proportion of poor people. However, these positive results haven’t been distributed to the public quite thoroughly. We then faced with concentration of growth in some areas or in some groups.

This results in disparities in both income and wealth as well as unequal access to basic necessities such as education, public health, welfare and infrastructure. This problem of inequality is still prevalent to this day.

While our economy grows, most people still feel that the economy is weak because of their reduced income.

The Government has not remained idle and has taken the stance that the reduction of disparities must be done in all dimensions. We need integrated solution to tackle the root cause for effective and sustainable results. This agenda is defined as one of six aspects of the 20-year national strategy for creating opportunities and social equality.

It is also included in the national reform plan, the National Economic and Social Development Plan and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy framework.

I would like to inform everyone of the Government’s efforts to resolve the issue of inequality by summarizing them into two formats.

The first is the allocation of welfare for groups such as children, the elderly, the disabled, the underprivileged, including low income farmers. This includes special assistance to those experiencing problems, especially the victims of natural disasters and the southern border conflict.

These measures have been implemented through programs such as the Pension Fund for the Elderly and the Disabled, the Land Allocation Program, the Student Grant Program, the Newborn Child Benefit Scheme, the State Welfare Card Scheme, and measures to promote the quality of life of small farmers.

The second is to increase the economic opportunity for the people by increasing access to basic life necessities, such as reducing the cost of living, the cost of education from kindergarten to basic education, the universal health insurance program, and access to financial services.

At present there are more than 40 state projects to help the Thai people, "from birth to death", and 12 other programs to assist those with difficulties.

What we must take into consideration is that these welfare programs cost over 500 billion baht per year. The Government must therefore maximize the benefit of its budget according to good governance and fiscal discipline. The Government has launched a program called "Create happiness in all ages”

It is a system that will help upgrade and modernize the welfare services for people and make important changes to the reform of the Thai bureaucratic system. Information technology systems are used to manage the state welfare database systematically.

A total of 11 ministries and agencies signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to support the development of Big Data to implement policies and measures and monitor and evaluate the government welfare system.

The TPMAP system will also be used to help the Government provide accurate assistance to those in need.

In addition, the information system in this project will also help prevent welfare fraud. The Comptroller General's Department of the Ministry of Finance will develop an online system for the public to be able to verify how many benefits one has received and whether someone has hijacked our entitlements.

After that, the Government Digital Development Agency (DGA) will develop an application to make sure everyone is aware of their benefits and to serve as a One Stop Service (OSS) for all welfare inquiries so that everyone is able to receive convenient services from the government via claiming their entitlements.

As I said before, integrated work to tackle the problem of inequality and poverty must be done simultaneously in multiple dimensions. This extends to other matters other than welfare as well.

Most recently, the Cabinet has approved the establishment of Thailand's first Department of Integrated Disparity and Poverty Reduction.

This is so that we have a main unit to integrate and coordinate our fight against poverty and inequality.

This agency will mobilize the country’s 20 year national strategy, conduct research on poverty and disparity, develop and monitor indicators, and establish Big Data center on poverty and inequality.

It will also help the Budget Bureau to consider allocating budget for poverty and inequality.

In the recent year, in addition to 500 billion I mentioned earlier, there is also a 300 billion baht regular budget for various ministries to address inequality and poverty issues. This all amounts to 800 billion baht.

We need to maximize the benefits of this budget and be in line with the 20 year national strategy and the national reform plan.

Moreover, we must enable communities to be able to grow from within and develop a sound foundation, according to the Royal Initiative of His Majesty King Rama IX.

His Majesty the King has royal initiative of continuing the Royal Projects of His Majesty King Rama IX.

The Government has urgently pushed and amended relevant laws relating to uplifting the quality of life of the people.

Currently, there are nearly 10 laws that will help promoting and supporting the poor and the underprivileged, providing opportunities, reducing inequality, and promoting fairness in life.

All the laws are important in reforming the country. This includes the Financial Institutions Act, the Community Enterprise Act, Social Enterprise Act, Community Forest Act, Thai Forest Act (revised to allow the public to cut harvest valuable trees in their land), National Land Board Act (to enable dwellers to remain in their forestlands legally, and the law that protects people doing transaction on sale with the right to redeem on their agricultural land/house.

Let me assure you that the Government attaches great importance to addressing the problem of inequality and views the problem in all dimensions so that it can better manage public policies both short and long term to achieve sustainable results.

I urge everyone to claim their entitlements and look for long-term income generating opportunities.

If you want to receive more income, you must think of the way. Government services through various projects provide a variety of resources and assistances. This will help broaden your economic opportunities if you are willing to adapt to the changing world, environment and technologies.

Please, do not forget to reduce unnecessary expenses by creating household income and expense accounts. It is an important home tool that will help you to live life in a sufficient way. Today we have to solve the problem of debt outside the system and repurchase agreements. Today we are accelerating all measures. Please keep track of the latest updates through all channels. These information can help you. Please, don’t have new debts.

Finally, the northern and northeastern regions will experience cooling temperatures while the southern region will experience less rainfall. Heavy rain can still be expected in some areas. I wish for your good health. Please keep track of weather conditions so that you can prepare yourself for changing weather patterns.

During the New Year festivals next week, if anyone has to return home or travel, please get enough rest, check the readiness of your vehicles, and make travel plans in advance.

For those in Bangkok who do not have any travel plans, I’d like to recommend day trips such as Ang Thong, with the largest Buddha in the world, the second reclining Buddha in Thailand, the Doll House Museum, coffee shop with paddy fields, or visit melon farms to experience over 10 varieties that can be made as desserts and ice cream.

Sing Buri is often an “in between” province, but it is the legendary province of "Bang Rachan" in Thai history. I want the youth to experience the market of Bang Rachan, Wat Pho Kao Ton, and other traditional and Pracharat markets.

Also, there is the Sing Buri festival from December 25 this year to January 3 next year. Sing Buri is the center of three major rivers, the Chao Phraya River, the Noi River, and the Lopburi River which are famous for their fish. I want people to enjoy these wonderful experiences. Your day trip can help generate cash flow.

Thank you and I wish you and your family a happy and safe New Year. Sawasdee Krub.

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