

**Opening Statement**  
**by**  
**Mr. Maitri Inthusut, Permanent secretary**  
**the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security**  
**at the 15<sup>th</sup> Session of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)**  
**30 March 2016, Geneva, Switzerland**

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**Good afternoon.**

**Madam Chairperson,**  
**Distinguished Members of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,**  
**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

1. On behalf of the Royal Thai Government, I would like to express our sincere appreciation for the opportunity to engage in a dialogue with the Committee today. I am honoured to lead the Thai delegation to this very important presentation of Thailand's initial report on the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

2. Yesterday, members of my delegation have observed the meetings of the Committee with other countries and civil society organisations with interest. For today and tomorrow, we hope to share some of our achievements and, more importantly, learn from the wisdom of the Committee, and seek guidance on how we can better address the remaining challenges in advancing the rights of persons with disabilities in Thailand.

3. I am pleased to see the presence here today of our friends and colleagues from the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand as well as civil society organisations. During the course of preparation of the national report and this presentation, we had useful meetings with both the NHRC and organisations for persons with disabilities, which helped us identify the remaining gaps and challenges in the implementation of the Convention.

4. The Thai delegation today comprises representatives from various Government agencies, namely, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour. We also have in our delegation experts on international human rights law, and representatives of persons with disabilities, who work for the Government as well as in academic institutions.

5. Just early this month, Thailand hosted the 3<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Working Group on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities 2013-2022 to follow up on the implementation of the Incheon Strategy to "make the rights real" for persons with disabilities in the region.

**Madam Chairperson,**

6. As of February this year, the total number of persons with disabilities registered with the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities in Thailand is 1.567 million or about 2.41% of total population. Over 830,000 are male and 730,000 are female. 50% are with physical disabilities, 18% with hearing disabilities, 11% with visual disabilities, and 7% are with mental

disabilities and 7% with intellectual disabilities. Almost 50% are over 60 years old, reflecting the overall aging population in Thailand.

7. Figures from the survey by National Statistical Office are a bit higher. The Office has been collaborating with relevant agencies to achieve more precise figures so that they can be used to shape and evaluate targeted policies.

8. In the meantime, relevant agencies in Thailand are working hard to reach out and encourage more persons with disabilities to register so that they are accorded appropriate support and assistance from the Government, the private sector, and civil society.

**Madam Chairperson,**

9. Thailand became party to the CRPD in 2008. The main law that allowed us to ratify the Convention was the Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Act 2007. This Act replaced the old Rehabilitation for Persons with Disabilities Act 1991, reflecting a major transformation of perspectives on persons with disabilities in Thailand from a charity-based to a rights-based paradigm and inclusiveness. The Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Act was later revised in 2013 to introduce new key policies and infrastructures such as Community-based Rehabilitation (CBR), disability service centres, and anti-discrimination mechanisms.

10. There has also been progress in many other areas. The National Committee on Rehabilitation was upgraded to become the National Committee on Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, chaired by the Prime Minister and represented by 11 Ministries, 7 national organizations for Persons with Disabilities, and 6 disabilities experts. Today the Committee serves as a main national mechanism that makes decision, formulates policies, and pushes forward agenda related to persons with disabilities ranging from issues such as support and grants, education and health care, anti-discrimination, to accessibility, employment, and independent living.

11. Our initial report on the implementation of the CRPD was done with reference to the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand 2007. The present Interim Constitution 2014 guarantees all human rights and dignity, in line with the previous Constitutions. A new Constitution has been drafted, taking inputs from all sectors of the society including various groups for persons with disabilities. The revised draft has been circulated to the public just yesterday so that a referendum will be held in early August this year.

12. Thailand is fully committed to the obligations under the CRPD. In February last year, we withdrew the interpretative declaration to Article 18, following the enactment of the Civil Registration Act. We are also in the process of becoming party to the Optional Protocol. The National Committee has endorsed, after reviewing the findings of a possibility study, the proposal by the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, for Thailand to accede to the Optional Protocol. Approval from the Cabinet is expected in April.

13. The National Committee has also expressed its keen interest in becoming a party to the Marrakesh Treaty. Although this treaty is new and would require us to amend our domestic

legislation, we see it, in principle, as a very useful instrument that would help further facilitate access to information and knowledge for persons with visual disabilities in Thailand.

**Madam Chairperson,**

14. Thailand achieved several MDG targets such as those on poverty eradication, education, gender equality, and health. Looking ahead towards the realisation of the SDGs, we will continue to implement development policies in a way that helps narrowing gaps among people and empowering the vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. Persons with disabilities are included in our 11<sup>th</sup> National Economic and Social Development Plan (2012-2016) and our 3<sup>rd</sup> National Human Rights Plan (2014-2018). Specifically, the 4<sup>th</sup> National Plan on Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities pronounces a vision for persons with disabilities in Thailand to live independently and happily in society with full and equal enjoyment of their rights.

15. Persons with disabilities are entitled to various forms of support in Thailand. Thai citizens with disabilities can register for disability identification cards which enable them to apply for benefits such as disability monthly allowances, medical rehabilitation services and assistive devices, free standard public transportation, free compulsory education with financial support for tertiary education, and interest free loans. Registered persons with disabilities can also request for services such as house modification, personal assistants, and sign language interpreters. These services are provided through collaboration among and between government agencies, the private sector, and civil society, including organisations for persons with disabilities.

16. Admittedly, challenges still remain. One of the main hurdles lies in the fact that most persons with disabilities in Thailand live in outer provinces and remote area. Almost 40% of registered persons with disabilities live in the Northeast. 11% are in the South and only 4% live in Bangkok. This makes it difficult for the Government to ensure that all have full access to services and assistances available.

17. Nevertheless, the Government has set up Provincial Sub-committees on Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, which are led by governors in 77 provinces of the country. These Sub-committees draft their own plans and design their own projects, for which they can seek funding from the Government. But a lot of persons with disabilities tend to live far from the provincial centre. It is, therefore, imperative for the Government to continue to cooperate with various partners and utilize the networks of organisations for persons with disabilities. We need to expand the coverage of disability service centres and strengthen community based rehabilitation for persons with disabilities throughout the country. Information technology can also help us reach out to wider potential groups in need.

18. Thailand also faces significant challenges in achieving a truly inclusive education for persons with disabilities. This is due to insufficient early intervention, inadequate resources and personnel, shortage of assistive equipment at schools, and lack of highly flexible educational system that tailors to specific needs of children with disabilities. This is why the majority, which is around 46% of the registered persons with disability, receive only elementary education. But as high as around 43% do not receive education at all. This poses even greater risk of unemployment

when they enter into the workforce. Government statistics reconfirm this. We found that as high as 46% of registered persons with disabilities in the working age today are unemployed.

19. The Government has worked hard to address this problem by, among other things, introducing the quota system in 2008. With this quota, private companies are required to employ one person with disability for every 100 persons hired. A similar system was recently introduced for the Government sector. Today, companies that do not fulfill this requirement will need to pay a fee to the Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Fund. This Fund provides interest-free loans for persons with disabilities to start their businesses. This Fund is also used to support organisations for persons with disabilities, capacity building activities, and research on assistive devices. The National Committee is now exploring different fund management models so that the Fund can be used more effectively to help persons with disabilities find jobs and truly empower them.

20. Multi-sectoral discrimination remains an issue in Thailand. We will continue to redouble our efforts to eliminate stereotypes and stigma against persons with disabilities, particularly those who are also discriminated because of their gender, ethnicity, and religion. We will raise awareness and promote understanding about the rights of persons with disabilities in families, at schools, at work, and in communities. Efforts will also be made to improve data collection and inter-agency coordination. This will help us monitor the situation and evaluate the implementation of our policies so that we can improve upon our efforts.

**Madam Chairperson,**

21. Looking at the causes of disabilities in Thailand, 31% resulted from diseases and illnesses, and 14% from accidents. These are all preventable. We need to do more on preventive measures. Early detection and treatment of new born babies, knowledge of essential nutrition, and road safety campaign are some of the examples that can help reduce the risk of persons becoming disabled. Last week, Thailand deposited the instrument for the ratification to the ILO Convention on Occupational Safety and Health 187. This is one of the key developments made in this regard.

22. In conclusion, we wish to reaffirm Thailand's full commitment to the CRPD. We look forward to our dialogue on ways to overcome the remaining challenges in Thailand. I am certain that the dialogue today and tomorrow will contribute to an even more robust implementation of the CRPD in Thailand.

Thank you.

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