

Inaugural Address by
H.E. Chakramon Phasukavanich
Minister of Industry
on the Occasion of the Opening of the
57th Session of the APO Governing Body
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APO Secretary-General Mari Amano,
APO Directors and Delegates,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

First and foremost, on behalf of the Government of Thailand, and the Ministry of Industry in particular, I would like to take this opportunity to extend my warm welcome to all delegates from APO members and honored guests from international cooperation organizations to participate and share in the 57th Session of the Asian Productivity Organization Governing Body today. Thank you very much for coming and choosing Thailand to be the host of this significant meeting.

As I once served as the APO Director for Thailand, and over the years I have been personally delighted to witness better recognition of the work of this organization by governments and businesses throughout the region and beyond. From a business perspective, productivity could generate more business opportunities and enhance competitiveness, resulting in better returns on investment. From a macro point of view, as a government administrator, I am of the view that productivity enhancement could elevate our national competitiveness platform in all sectors, improve social equality, provide more opportunities and quality of life to our people, and utilize our resources in the most effective and efficient ways.

Therefore, APO, your task is important. Your work on productivity has not only reduced transaction costs and provided prosperity to our generation, but also transmitted wealth and a better quality of life to our children. I am sure that all essential agenda items to be tabled in this meeting will strengthen our cooperation and the APO, and ultimately they will benefit all.

As all of us are very well aware, productivity covers a wide range of activities, from hardware facilities, for instance, multimode transportation systems, to software, such as management skills and human resources development. At this point, I would like to take a few minutes of your time to give you a picture of what the current government has done, is doing, and plans to do for improving our national productivity as we are approaching the ASEAN Economic Community, the full integration of ASEAN by the end of this year.

Regarding our preparation of hardware facilities, we are well aware that ASEAN will create a free trade area comprising 10 countries, which will create opportunities for businesses entering into a huge market with a total population of almost 600 million people. Moreover, a zero percent tariff rate together with a freer flow of investment and freer movement of professional and skilled labor will help the region enhance its competitiveness through economies of scale and economies of scope.

Being located in the heart of the ASEAN mainland, Thailand gains an edge in logistics and transportation, especially in land connectivity with the Indochina region. Even though the government continues to improve railroad networks with neighboring countries, the major routes are those along the North-South and East-West economic corridors. These projects will help transport goods passing through Thailand faster and reduce logistics costs significantly.

Other plans include additional deep seaport facilities, an expansion of airport facilities, and better road connectivity with all neighbors. Work will begin mid-year on further expansion of the Laem Chabang Seaport, including the railway center for container transport. Next year, we plan to begin construction on an additional runway at Suvarnabhumi International Airport, which is part of the overall airport expansion program in Thailand.

On the soft side, many regulations and laws have been amended. The Ministry of Industry has reduced time for all license approvals drastically. By speeding up this approval process, it not only cut transaction costs for firms but also improved their business opportunities in the fast-moving market. Moreover, we also initiated training programs on productivity enhancement for entrepreneurs and businesses to ensure their resilience after the upcoming ASEAN integration and competitiveness in dynamic international trade. Our training programs included management skill development, marketing, business strategy, cost

reduction, quality improvement, and so on. This year, we expect to have more 2,000 businesses, especially SMEs, attend our programs. We strongly believe that with these programs on productivity enhancement they will be well equipped to engage in the more liberalized trade regime.

I would like to conclude by saying that this government sets its sights on the path forward to ensure our sustained growth and a bright future for our next generation. All efforts employed to reach our ultimate destination must be done with productivity consciousness.

Once again, thank you very much for giving Thailand the privilege of hosting this APO meeting here in Bangkok. For our foreign guests, during your stay in this beautiful city of Bangkok, I hope that you will have some free time to explore our Thai hospitality, culture, food, and many wonderful things, which will make your visit a memorable one. Thank you very much.