

Opening Remarks
by
His Excellency Mr. Damrong Kraikruan,
Deputy Permanent Secretary for Bilateral Affairs,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand
at the “Thailand and South Africa: 25 Years of Partnership” seminar
hosted by
the Royal Thai Embassy in Pretoria and the South African Institute of
International Affairs (SAIIA)
21 August 2018, 09.30 hrs.
SAIIA, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

His Excellency Mr. Geoffrey Doidge, Ambassador of the Republic of South Africa to Thailand

His Excellency Mr. Komate Kamalanavin, Ambassador-Designate of Thailand to South Africa

Miss Elizabeth Sidiropoulos, Chief Executive of SAIIA, Scholars, Academics and Students,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning

It is my pleasure to take part in this “Thailand and South Africa: 25 Years of Partnership” academic seminar here at SAIIA, Johannesburg.

I thank the Royal Thai Embassy and SAIIA for initiating this event, as part of our celebration of the 25th Anniversary of the Diplomatic Relations between Thailand and South Africa.

Although our official diplomatic relations were only just founded in 1993, historical contacts from both sides have been made since the 17th Century when the Siamese envoys, who were en route to Europe, survived the shipwreck at the Cape Agulhas and made their way across the tip of Africa to the Cape Peninsula to seek shelter. They were considered the first Siamese who arrived in today’s South Africa. Ever since, exchanges of contact have been made throughout the 19th and 20th Centuries.

During the Apartheid era, Thailand fully supported the struggle of the people of South Africa and the African National Congress by supporting the United Nations resolutions against the Apartheid regime. At the end of Apartheid, the Royal Thai Government was among the first few countries to re-establish official contacts with the South African Government by opening the Royal Thai Consulate-General in Johannesburg in 1992, followed by the Embassy in Pretoria in 1993.

With a remarkable trade volume of 3.2 billion USD in 2017, Thailand is the top trading partner of South Africa in South East Asia while South Africa is also the top trading partner of Thailand in Africa. Meanwhile, on the dimension of people-to-people exchange, I am pleased to learn that Thailand is one of the most popular destinations for South African travelers, having welcomed more than 93,000 South African visitors to the Kingdom in 2017 alone. Concurrently, South Africa is also home to around 4,000 Thai nationals living, working and conducting businesses, and studying in the country; making it the largest Thai community in Africa.

As we commemorate the Silver Jubilee of our diplomatic relations, we also continue to celebrate these robust political, economic, and people-to-people ties, upon which concentered our positioning as strategic partners in our respective regions. Since the official establishment of our diplomatic relations, our countries have enjoyed cordial and strong connections which I hope will only continue to strengthen and flourish in the years to come.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The academic seminar today will explore the development and progress of both countries' relations and discuss the background, areas of common interests, cooperation, as well as challenges and future opportunities that exist in our relations.

The first session will look at the historical ties through archival documents never shown to the public before. The Royal Thai Embassy has traced back the old documents that show the exchanges of contact between both countries since the 20th Century.

The second session will be a discussion of the development of the bilateral relations since 1993, the future opportunities and areas of potential in bilateral cooperation such as political relations, trade and investment, and people-to-people contacts.

Thailand and South Africa are both considered emerging economies and major players in their respective regions with leading roles in regional affairs. Therefore, the last session will explore the comparative perspectives of each country in regional and global arenas to see how both countries can together help contribute their actions in regional and global issues.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As this year South Africa celebrates the Centenary Birthday of the late President Nelson Mandela which coincides with the 25th Anniversary of the Thai - South African diplomatic relations, Thailand joins the world in honouring and commemorating his legacy to the people of South Africa and to the world.

We also wish to express our gratitude to his contribution to the Thai - South African relations. In fact, Mr. Mandela paid his visit to Thailand twice. His first official visit to Thailand was in 1997. During his visit, he was graciously granted an audience with His Majesty the Late King Bhumibol Adulyadej. His second visit to Thailand was in 2004 when he was invited as Guest of the Thai Government in the 15th International AIDS Conference in Bangkok. This underlines the cordial relations which both countries enjoy contributed by Mr. Mandela.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to thank the Royal Thai Embassy and SAIIA for hosting this event today. I am certain that the discussion in this seminar will help bring about not only a greater academic cooperation, but a stronger partnership between Thailand and South Africa in the years to come.

I wish you all a success.

Thank you very much.
