

**Statement**

**by**

**H.E. Watana Muangsook**

**Minister of Social Development and Human Security**

**Head of the Delegation of Thailand**

**The Thirty-fourth Session of the Committee**

**On the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women**

**United Nations, New York**

**January 20, 2006**

Madame Chairperson,  
Honorable CEDAW Committee,  
Distinguished Participants,

1. It is indeed a great honor and pleasure for me to lead the Delegation of the Royal Thai Government to present Thailand's combined fourth and fifth report to this distinguished Committee. The Thai Government regards our reporting to the Committee not only as a legal obligation under Article 18 of the CEDAW Convention, but also as a mutual learning process, which would contribute to the advancement of our women at both national and global levels. I sincerely look forward to a constructive and fruitful interchange of views in a hope that this event will give us an opportunity to review our past achievements, obstacles and existing gender disparities in our country.

Madame Chairperson,

2. When Thailand last presented our Report to the Committee in early 1999, the present 1997 Thai Constitution, which is a product of the most democratic and fully participatory drafting process the country ever experienced, was recently promulgated. The Constitution provides for the greatest range of rights and liberties for our people, including women's rights. This Constitution makes the Thai society one of the freest in the region.

3. The present Thai Government, which was elected in 2001, and re-elected in 2005, has made the achievement of economic recovery due to the aftermath of the 1997 Asian financial crisis and the fulfilling of the constitutional requirements the country's top national priorities. The Government also attaches great importance to effective implementation of our obligations under international human rights instruments to which Thailand is a party, including those under CEDAW. We believe that these efforts would assist us to better serve the best interests of our people.

4. That is why, since Thailand acceded to the Convention in 1985, we have applied the Convention as an implementing guideline to eliminate discrimination against women in the country. Before I take the time to inform the Committee of our recent developments in women's area in Thailand, I would like to assure you with a simple point of reason why Thailand is so committed and willing to support equal rights and opportunities among gender.

Madame Chairperson,

5. The Thai Government realizes that the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women is integral to the country's full and effective realization of human rights. In addition, I would also like to take you into a reality of Thailand. Out of the current population of around 65 millions, fifty percent of our Thai population are female. If Thailand were to grow economically into a more powerful nation in the region and the global stage, it is important for Thailand to make certain that the productive sectors of the country can function effectively and efficiently.

6. By saying this, it is obvious that Thailand will need the almost fifty percent female population to take part as a valuable force, functioning behind our production and growth. To ensure this, the Thai government needs to provide equal opportunity for both women and men so that they, our women, will be capable of obtaining rights and, afterwards, capability not only to survive hand in hand with men but also to move and lead the country if they can. Therefore, there is no reason for Thailand not to protect our human assets whether they are female or male. The Thai Government has always been in support of the policy to provide equal opportunities to our fellow citizens.

7. Given our strong reasons towards equal opportunity as part of the national assets and obligations to these international agreements, Thailand has put forward many policies in order to ensure maximum opportunity that can be provided to all. At the

same time, throughout these years, Thailand has undertaken many initiatives to promote the status of women.

8. One of our significant monuments was the 1997 Constitution that specifies equal rights and opportunities for all people. This new constitution has led to the amendment of many laws and the establishment of several constitutional organizations to ensure fair treatment between women and men as well as the protection of women's rights.

9. One of the important recent developments of the institutional mechanisms directly related to women's advancement was the later-transformed National Commission on Women's Affairs into the Office of the Women's Affairs and Family Development Bureau (OWAFD) under the newly formed Ministry of Social Development and Human Security where I currently take the office. The Ministry's broad mandate includes the development, assistance, and protection to our children, youth, women, elderly, and the disabled.

10. This reform has rendered a higher administrative status and broader scope of responsibility to the country's principle mechanism in charge of the advancement of women. Special National Committees on the Promotion of the Rights of Women, of Children, Youth, and of the Disabled have been established in conjunction with the Ministry's policy mandates. There are also members of NGOs and experts who officially sit on these committees to provide transparency and broad outcome.

11. In addition, to ensure the promotion of gender equality nationwide, every ministry and department also follows the similar mandate to assign a high-ranking official as a Chief Gender Equality Officer and to establish a Gender Focal Point to promote and integrate the principle of gender equality into the implementation of the Women's Development Plan. The Plan will serve as a national framework and map for our women's development.

Madame Chairperson,

12. As the Committee would recall, the Committee adopted a set of recommendations during its previous examination of Thailand's Report in 1999, which laid out priority areas where Thailand could improve its implementation of CEDAW. I am delighted to inform the Committee that, in addition to widely disseminating those recommendations among relevant public and non-governmental sectors, the Thai government has also undertaken a number of measures to implement those recommendations. The efforts of the Thai government have already resulted in an advancement of the women in several areas. Permit me to highlight only two principal issues.

13. Firstly, with regard to the withdrawal of Thailand's reservation to Article 16 of the Convention relating to family and marriage, I am delighted to inform that Thailand removed the reservation to Article 16 (g) of the Convention in 2003. And in 2005, the country's Name Act was amended to enable married women to retain their maiden name if they so wish. To date, Thailand could, therefore, comply with most stipulations under Article 16. The few remaining provisions of the country's family law, which may still be seen as discriminated against women, are continuously being raised and widely discussed among lawyers and legislators. Important new amendments to the Civil and Commercial Code concerning engagement and divorce have been proposed to further promote gender equality in family life and are now under the consideration of the Office of the Council of State.

14. The Thai Government is doing its utmost to bring the country's Family Law in line with Article 16 of the Convention while ensuring that the adopted measures do not undermine the richness of Thailand's cultures and traditions, including the sacred fabric of the Thai society and family institution. The Committee can also rest assured that independent national mechanisms created under the present 1997 Constitution, such as the National Human Rights Commission, the Ombudsman, and the Constitutional Court, have been effectively operating as the effective

mechanisms to safeguard all aspects of women's rights. For instance, the aforementioned amended Name Act was successfully completed pursuant to the ruling of the Constitutional Court.

15. Secondly, with regard to the Committee's recommendation for the introduction of a specific anti-discrimination legislation, the Thai Government has seriously given consideration to that recommendation. Therefore, notwithstanding the fact that the Thai Constitution already provides an overarching guarantee against discrimination on the grounds of sex, the Government is in the process of further drafting a much specific legislation on the issue. The mentioned draft law called the "Gender Equality Bill" will provide a clear description of discrimination, and specify as well as address practices that could be considered as discrimination against women.

16. In drafting the said legal instrument, a broad and inclusive participatory process has been adhered to. Similar national and international instruments related to the issue of discrimination, including CEDAW and other countries' laws, are being studied as guidelines. There is also a plan for public hearings with regard to the content of the draft instrument in due course.

Madame Chairperson,

17. After addressing the overall attitude towards supporting equal rights between men and women and illustrating to you the advancement that Thai women now gain, I would like to touch upon more details of Thailand's progress in the implementation of the Convention. To simplify our undertaking, please allow me to group the details into **six specific areas**, beginning with; **first**, violence against women; **second**, trafficking and exploitation of women; **third**, participation of women in political and public office; **fourth**, status of women minority, hill - tribe and ethnic groups; **fifth**, women labor; and finally **sixth**, economic and social benefits for women.

18. **Firstly** for the concrete policy and legal progress regarding **violence against women**, the Thai Cabinet has already approved the draft Act on the Prevention and Resolution of Domestic Violence. The specific policy so-called the “Eight Measures to Solve Problems Concerning Violence against Women” and the “Policies and Plans to Eradicate Violence against Children and Women” have also been endorsed by the Cabinet. Besides, several services have been arranged to provide assistance to victims of violence.

19. To more effectively address the problem at the grass-root level, the Government has also set up a family development center at the community level, which acts as a surveillance network to help prevent domestic problems and violence. A one-stop crisis service center is now available in public hospitals throughout the country. A number of 24-hour Hotline Centers have been set up to provide counseling services and to coordinate referral of victims to concerned authorities. There exists the Center for the Protection of Children, Youth, and Women within the Police Department to offer a more victim-sensitive assistance.

20. In order to raise public awareness of violence issues and the outcomes of the government policies, the Cabinet has declared November as a month to intensify the campaign for the elimination of violence against women and children. The white ribbon is used as a symbol to promote anti-violence network throughout the country.

21. Looking forward, Thailand plans to take further steps to eliminate violence against women by expediting the enforcement of domestic violence and other related laws, while at the same time, raising public and personnel awareness on the issue of violence on a continuing basis. One of the plans is to establish a single database of violence and to support surveys and research on the issue.

22. **Secondly**, in order to more effectively tackle the problem of **trafficking and exploitation of women**, the Prime Minister of

Thailand has injected the highest level of political will to proclaim this issue a national agenda in August 2004. A specific draft: the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, is currently in the enacting process to tackle with the trafficking issue.

23. The main focus of the Act is on the protection of human rights of victims while imposing heavier penalties on the offenders. Coordination is now underway to ensure enforcement of this law, not only in countries of origin but also in destination countries such as Japan and Germany, so as to ban the treatment of victims as criminals. The Act also provides for the establishment of a fund to be derived from confiscated money or properties from human trafficking and related offenses. The fund will be used for the protection of victims, their families and witnesses of human trafficking.

24. In term of policies, the National Policy and Plan on the Prevention and Suppression of Domestic and International Trafficking in Children and Women was formulated. During the same time, the establishment of the National Committee to Prevent and Suppress Human Trafficking has led to a founding of an Operation Center on Human Trafficking under the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security. This Committee along with Human Trafficking Operation Center serves as a network of focal points on human trafficking among provincial authorities in Thailand and Thai Embassies and Consulate-Generals in every country. This network will coordinate on victim handling procedures in order to best keep the integrity and fairness of all cases.

25. Since human trafficking is a transnational issue, the Thai government has made the collective efforts and close cooperation with various NGOs and neighboring countries to overcome the problem. These efforts include the adoption of Memoranda of Understanding among government agencies and NGOs, the bilateral cooperation with Cambodia, and Lao PDR, as well as the Sub-regional cooperation in the Greater Mekong Sub-Region.

26. It is reasonable to say that the major obstacles of the trafficking problem are deep-rooted in poverty, social attitudes and understanding, as well as ineffective law enforcement. Therefore, several campaigns, some of which have been conducted through mass media, to raise public awareness of the true and broad definition of human trafficking and to promote the principle of self-sufficiency should be made a long-term measure. More efforts will be placed on capacity building of personnel and on effective enforcement of law to eventually reduce the unwelcomed development gaps between men and women, between urban and rural areas, and among neighboring countries.

27. **Thirdly, with regard to women's participation in the political and public office,** Thailand has committed to the challenging Millennium Development Goal Plus in this area, which aims to double the proportion of women in the national parliament, sub-district administrative organizations and executive positions in civil service by 2006. To achieve these goals, the Thai Government has implemented many measures to encourage women's participation in existing decision-making channels through cooperation with NGOs and women's groups. There has been the formation of women's networks in local politics and a composition of the guideline to promote gender equality among government personnel and administration.

28. As a result of all the Thai government's efforts towards gender equality, women's participation in politics and the high-level public positions has increased significantly. There have been an increasing number of women who are ready and skillful in politics, as seen in the general election in 2001, and more recently in 2005, where increased number of female members of parliament has become evident. There are also an increasing number of women who now hold top positions in civil service, including many director generals and ambassadors to important places such as Vice President of the House of Representatives, Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador to Germany, WTO, and so forth.

29. The **fourth issue** of women belonging to **minority, hill-tribes and ethnic groups**, Thailand attaches great importance to the promotion and protection of the fundamental human rights of every individual in our country. Necessary and appropriate services have continuously been provided by the concerned government agencies to guarantee security of all groups of women, with special emphasis on certain vulnerable groups. Due to time constraint, allow me to focus on one particular group which is hill-tribe women.

30. At present, out of approximately million hill-tribe people living in the country, about half of them are women and girls. Over 80 percent of these people have already been granted Thai citizenship. In addition to providing access to health care and basic education, the Thai Cabinet further endorsed the Strategy on the Management of Status Problem and Rights of Persons in January 2005. The Strategy includes measures to consider and identify appropriate legal status for people with status and rights problems, as well as measures to instill people's awareness of their fundamental rights without any gender bias.

31. To illustrate upon the implementation of the Strategy, the Thai Government not only passed a Proposed Plan for Implementation but also approved Thai citizenship to almost fourteen thousand displaced people, which highlanders comprised the highest number with 6,363 persons.

32. **Fifth, on the issue of women workers**, the Thai Government is committed to support and promote gender equality and non-discriminatory practices in order to ensure that their rights are duly protected. The 1998 Labor Protection Act serves as a key mechanism to safeguard the rights of women workers. Whether they are Thai or foreign, female workers are covered with special legal protection based on different physical strength, childbearing responsibilities and occupational safety. The Thai Government has also attempted to ensure that basic protection is accorded to foreign migrant workers through a regularization scheme. To this end, successive rounds of the nationwide registration of illegal migrant

workers from neighboring countries have been conducted. These migrant workers are also entitled to basic protection in accordance with the 1998 Labor Protection Act.

33. Finally, in the area of **social and economic benefits; namely education, health, and economic facilitation**, I am personally pleased to announce that Thailand has achieved the Millennium Development Goals by eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education. Women's access to health care services has been improved through "the 30 baht or 75 cents National Health System" that cover expenses relating to maternity and women's diseases such as pregnancy, vaginal cancer, and HIV medicines.

34. Rural women have an improved access to credits through the Village Fund project that provides loans without requiring collateral.

Madame Chairperson,

35. All the information provided is by no means an exhaustive report of what have been done in Thailand to implement the provisions of CEDAW during the past 7 years. However, despite all the efforts made, the Government realizes that we can always do more for the better. Therefore, further steps are planned to take action in order to enhance women's capacity building in all spheres of competency, and to adopt both direct and indirect measures to convince the society to change some of its remaining deep-rooted misperceptions on the roles and dignity of women.

36. On behalf of the Royal Thai Government and the Thai people, I would, therefore, like to take this opportunity to commend all the parties concerned including UN agencies such as UNIFEM, UNICEF, UNESCO and UNDP as well as ILO, IOM, and other international organizations, for their active contribution and partnership with the Thai Government to promote the advancement of women not only in Thailand but also in the region.

Madame Chairperson,

37. Before I conclude, I wish to reiterate that the Thai delegation is here today with full appreciation of the work that the CEDAW Committee has done for the promotion of human rights around the world and for the major contribution the CEDAW Convention has made for the cause of women's rights. My presence with you also bears testimony to the Thai Government's political commitment to the spirit and principles of the CEDAW Convention, and to the promotion and protection of fundamental human rights and liberty.

38. Representatives of my delegation stand ready to enter into a further detailed exchange of views with the Committee. The inclusion of a greater number of high-level representatives from several key government agencies in this delegation is aimed at ensuring both a fruitful interactive dialogue during this session and a productive follow-up. Last but not least, the number of high-ranking women delegates represented in this delegation also speaks for itself the ever growing and active participation of Thai women in political and public life, at the national as well as international level.

39. I, on behalf of the Royal Thai Government, am committed to continue to work closely with all sectors, especially the civil society, so that women's potentials can be best utilized for the benefits of the society at large. I would like to take this final opportunity to ensure that this Convention will remain the centerpiece in Thailand's overall emphasis on women's rights.

Thank you.