

Opening Speech
by
H.E. Mr. Pongpol Adireksarn
Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand
Chairman of the National Education Commission
to
The Second International Forum on Education Reform
: Key Factors in Effective Implementation
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The Ambassador Hotel, Bangkok

Dr. Rung Kaewdang, Secretary- General of the National Education Commission and Chairman of the Forum's Organizing Committee

Your Excellencies,

Forum participants,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great honor to join you this afternoon in the opening ceremony of the Second International Forum on Education Reform: Key Factors in Effective Implementation. Please allow me to welcome all forum participants who have been tirelessly supporting education reforms in your respective

countries. For those of you who came from overseas, I, on behalf of the Royal Thai Government, sincerely hope that your five or-more-day stay in Thailand will present to you not only a fruit of thoughts, but also a joyful journey and delightful acquaintance to Thai hospitality of which kindness, gentleness, and tenderness are well known to all visitors. Please take your time to experience yourselves with all aspects of our enriched culture that we are truly proud of.

I am sure, ladies and gentlemen, that many of you who came from every corner of Thailand and around the world might somehow have participated in the first forum which dedicated to “Experiences of Education Reform in 12 Countries”. From last year’s success, Office of the National Education Commission of Thailand, UNESCO’ s Bangkok Office, and SEAMEO have worked hand-in-hand with another 12 international and local institutes to follow this academic tradition. I, on this note, would like to convey my personal

gratitude to Dr. Rung Kaewdang and distinguished members of the forum's organizing committee who have made this important event happen again in Thailand. I have no doubt on my mind that this Second International Forum on Education Reform will be a trademark gathering that does not only bring in new concepts and examples of the education reform as a national agenda, but also heralds possible cooperation among participating countries to push forward this cause as an international agenda in many years to come.

Ladies and gentlemen

From 1997, Thailand has confronted with an unimaginable economic downturn starting with a sharp decline of foreign investment, a reduction of Thai exports to the world market, and finally an unprecedented collapse of financial institutes. However, we adamantly decided to overturn this overwhelming suffer into a golden opportunity to avert Thai

society into a sustainably- developed as well as knowledge-based society. This reversal of fortune gained a popular support to the Constitution of 1997 that was enacted to achieve ambitious political as well as social reforms.

On the forefront of the social reforms was the education reform, as the drafters of the Constitution regarded education to be a wealth of the nation that must be fully realized. The Constitution acknowledges, for the first time, the undeniable right of 12-year basic education with quality and free of charge. Most importantly, this highest law of the Land also implies an idea of the comprehensive education reform by stipulating a need to draft an education act to achieve high quality of educational service to ensure the obtainment of high quality citizens in the learning-based society.

Thanks to this national consensus, the National Education Act, that was passed two years later, serves as a platform of education reform in Thailand. The upbeat vision of this task

was clearly laid out by the Prime Minister of Thailand, His Excellency Dr. Thaksin Shinawatra, who has deemed this reform as a national agenda to improve the quality of life by enabling learners to learn how to learn and to develop their analytical abilities as well as critical thinking essential for their future work and lifelong learning. Above all, the life skills of Thai learners, both young and old, will be strengthened to equip them to cope with the affronting problems in life with dignity and decency. Let me brief to you some of the recent programs to accomplish these ends.

Firstly, Office of the National Education Commission is attempting to outline a National Roadmap of Learning from 0 – 20 years of age. This navigating action plan shall visualize expected characteristics of all Thais that have been developed from the formal, non-formal, and informal learning processes. With this map, a list of responsible agencies, public, private,

and non-profit organizations, shall be clearly spelt out as a network of providers. At the end, the government will use this map to design the curriculum and qualification frameworks of various occupations in Thailand. Therefore, this learning framework can be considered as a roadmap for intellectual wealth of the nation.

Secondly, this administration is trying to integrate all sources of knowledge existing in various public and private agencies as a pool of new learning materials. For example, the National Library of Thailand is trying to convey knowledgeable contents from tons of ancient manuscript or Kam Pee Bai Larn into new learning materials. This antiquity knowledge, which once was treated as a past, will be re-shined again as sources of inquiry in medicine, architecture, farming, or cooking. This knowledge, along side with the printing as well as non-printing media from various government agencies

such as Departments of Fishery, Agricultural Extension, or Office of the National Identity, is among the first targets to establish a grid of learning, a direct linkage between learner-centered approach and pool of the knowledge for self inquiry.

Ladies and gentlemen

I recently have a chance to exchange the idea with a group of the international scholars who have admirably observed our progress of education reform and ended up simply by asking me, as Deputy Prime Minister supervising on both education reform and bureaucratic management reform about the key success factors of education reform in Thailand. My personal observation and experience in the past two years have repeatedly confirmed me that:

Firstly, Thailand is lucky enough to have such a versatile education act that visionarily illustrates areas of concentration, direction of desirable education system, and a final result if

this law is fully implemented. As such, the legal consonance with the era of social as well as economic reforms serves as the first factor in our effective implementation.

The second factor comes from a free-and-fair discussion toward the path of changes. During the past three years, this roadmap of education reform in Thailand has been subjected to strongly criticized by both international and local media. The matter of concern is not on why to reform, but on how to effectively implement this task under a time constraint. A changing circumstance, which some of you may notice, is that education reform in our country is literally regarded as a hot issue on the front page of daily Thai newspapers. Even though it was somehow be portrayed as a policy disagreement among implementators, we can not deny the fact that the people of Thailand have welcomed this initiative and looked forward to getting this task done for the sake of their own children. Therefore, the public support and leadership from all sides to

revamp the education system serve as the second factor in effective implementation.

Finally and most importantly, education reform in Thailand was sensibly acknowledged the process of learning reform as a way to increase the learner's intellectual capital. If we can boost up learners' abilities to think, analyze, criticize, and obtain the ample knowledge as well as the arts of living, Thai education shall, in time, maximize the intellectual wealth of the nation. If all Thai learners, through the process of learner-centered approach and lifelong learning, can reach their fullest competence, civil virtue, and lifelong happiness, these outcomes can be considered as a lifetime success of this reform.

To conclude my speech, ladies and gentlemen, I hope that all participants will use this gathering to come up with your own ideas on key factors in effective implementation of education reforms in your countries. Moreover, this message

should be translated into real actions at your own localities to bring about a high quality education worldwide. I now officially declare open the Second International Forum on Education Reform: Key Factors in Effective Implementation and wish the forum and all participants the very best.

Thank you very much