

THAILAND

**Address delivered to Participants of the International Symposium
“Sharing Best Electoral Practices”
by H.E. Mr. Apichart Sukhaggonond, ECT Chairman
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Involving the Youth in Electoral Process

Chief Election Commissioner
Election Commissioners
Your Excellencies
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honor and a pleasure for me to extend my sincere congratulations to the Election Commission of India on the occasion of its Diamond Jubilee Celebration. During 60 years of the Republic of India as the biggest democratic country in the world, the Election Commission of India has shown and proven to the world its wisdom in managing elections so successfully and effectively. Thailand has learnt a lot from your electoral expertise and experiences. Our two Election Commissions have had excellent relationships since 2001. Today, our relationship has been enhanced and strengthened through regular exchange of visits at all levels, including the observation of our respective national elections. I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of my delegation; to express my deepest appreciation to the Election Commission of India for inviting us to attend today's celebration as well as participating in the International Symposium on “Sharing Best Electoral Practices”.

Excellencies

Today, I am going to share with you our experiences in “Involving the Youth in the Electoral Process”.

The Election Commission of Thailand or ECT in short, is an independent body under the Constitution of Thailand. Our main responsibility is to supervise election and referendum at all levels be it national or local. Moreover, the ECT has constitutional duties to conduct civic education about democracy and election as well as getting the public involved in political process. So far, the ECT has been conducting many projects to arouse political public awareness and assimilate democratic principles as the people's way of life. There have been many

volunteers from various sectors to assist the work of the ECT in disseminating knowledge and understanding about election and democracy to the public.

The present Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, Section 236, stipulates that it is the duty of the ECT to promote and support the NGOs by coordinating with various governmental agencies, state agencies, state enterprises, local authorities to educate the people about democratic regime with the King as Head of State. Moreover, the 2007 Organic Act on the Election Commission, Section 30, stipulates that the ECT shall disseminate academic work and educate the people as well as the election candidates about the democratic regime with the King as Head of State, promoting political public participation and urging the people to vote honestly and fairly.

Since its inception, the ECT has been calling on the people, the NGOs and the provincial communities to participate in the electoral process in an honest and fair manner. Additionally, we try to cultivate democratic consciousness amongst the people, especially students and the youth, in order to create a sustainable democratic way of life and democratic spirit in the Thai society. The youth will be the next generation and new voters. Therefore, they should be educated about democracy and election process. If the youth are aware of their rights and realize how important it is to be good citizen, they will not accept bribe for voting. They will also turn their backs to corrupt politician who may be their representative through vote buying and rigging. The ECT has more projects involving students and the youth than other target groups.

Distinguished delegates

I shall begin with the first project called the ECT Voluntary Scout for Democratic Development Project or the “ECT Voluntary Scout”. Some of you may have doubt about the connection between scouts and elections. Let me tell you that the ECT’s role is to be impartial, transparent and helping the people to understand democracy and electoral process. It must provide convenience to the voters as well. Whereas the main principles of scouts are honesty, responsibility, neutrality and democracy, you can now see that the ECT and the scouts share similar principles. The ECT therefore seizes this opportunity to utilize scouts in serving their communities and turn them into “Democratic Ladies and Democratic Gentlemen”.

Thus the project “ECT Voluntary Scout” was initiated in the year 2007 by the ECT in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the National Scout Organization aiming to promote democracy, honest and fair elections.

This project has 5 objectives as follows:

1. To commemorate H.M. King Bhumibol 80th Birthday Anniversary in the year 2007.
2. To provide and enhance knowledge, comprehension including consciousness by scouts about democratic governance with the King as Head of State through honest and fair election. The scouts will then realize that it is important to choose good representatives to govern the country.
3. To provide the youth with the knowledge in voting procedure so that they can do it confidently and effectively without vote-buying influence.
4. To solicit the help from the youth to call on the people to come out to vote.
5. To enable the scouts to provide public service by disseminating knowledge and comprehension about democracy including, principle of peaceful coexistence with their peers, families and general public. In addition, they can assist the ECT Office in facilitating voters, for example, elders and disabled persons at the polling stations.

The ECT Voluntary Scout program consists of field courses and outdoor training so that scouts can understand democratic principles, methods to provide services and convenience to the voters and the danger of vote-buying.

Distinguished guests

So far the ECT Office has conducted trainings and built up the ECT Voluntary Scout Units in 273 schools in 76 provinces throughout Thailand. Now-a-days, there are about 12,243 (twelve thousand two hundred and forty three) ECT Voluntary Scouts from students in primary and secondary schools all over the country.

The ECT Voluntary Scout has greatly assisted the work of the ECT Office in disseminating information about elections as well as providing conveniences to voters especially the elderly and disabled persons at both national and local elections. Their duties, inter alias, include assisting

eligible voters to check their names in the electoral roll and providing information about voting procedures.

The ECT Office has currently expanded the ECT Voluntary Scout Project to private schools that are under the supervision of the Private Education Commission and the Church of Christ in Thailand. Recently, the ECT Office has conducted special training for students from the hill tribe groups living in rural areas of northern part of Thailand.

Last year, the ECT Voluntary Scout Project has earned an international recognition when H.M. King Carl the Sixteenth Gustav of Sweden was in Chiangmai and I had the honor to report to H.M., who is the Honorary President of World Scout Body, about the existence of ECT Voluntary Scout for Democratic Development. I am proud to inform you that H.M. the King of Sweden has shown keen interest in the project judging from the many questions that he asked.

Distinguished guests

King Rama the Sixth who was the founder of Thai Scouts gave the motto "Better Die than Lie" to the Thai Scouts and it brought accountability and integrity to them. The ECT Voluntary Scout Project has highlighted this special nature of the Thai scouts by finding the ways for them to serve their community impartially and help to promote peace and sustainable democracy. Since the ECT Voluntary Scout Project has proven to be a success in Thailand, I am sure that it can work in other parts of the world as well.

Another project that the ECT involves the youth in the electoral process is "Voluntary Students to Assist the ECT's Works". Students are recognized by the public as integral power who are educated and believe in fairness. Most of them are new eligible voters and if they are provided with clear understanding about democracy, they will be good quality voters that ultimately cause a meaningful democratic election.

The ECT has been conducting civic education for students about the democratic regime as well as cultivating their democratic consciousness in order that they will have democratic mind. In addition, the ECT gives an opportunity for anyone to be a volunteer for helping operations of the ECT including running public campaign to educate people about democracy and election as well as being member of polling station committee.

So far, there have been many students serving as members of polling station committee in both national and local elections and the ECT anticipates that there will be students working in committee at every polling station throughout the country.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Until now, the ECT is only a new born organization and it has just celebrated its 11th Anniversary in June last year. It has a vision to be, among others, the impartial and independent organization, which controls and conducts elections as well as referendum in efficient and transparent manner. The whole process involves public participation and electoral education on a continuing basis. It also aims to reform politics and makes it more effective and acceptable to the public at large. The ECT has strong will to create sustainable democratic society in Thailand. Moreover, the ECT is willing to work with NGOs and political parties to make elections as clean as possible. Politicians and all political parties should also improve their qualities and fairness in the electoral contest. They should be encouraged to establish their own ethics and code of conduct for running the election campaign. Voters must also change their voting culture and create a value system in order that the honest and dishonest politicians could be differentiated and only the good ones are voted into the office basing on their own merits.

The Election Commission, the people, the government officials, the media, the politicians, the political parties and the NGOs must act together and make a collective effort to bring about honest and fair election. To achieve this aim, the institutional capability must be strengthened to support the management of elections, to organize political parties, and to broaden citizen's knowledge about electoral and political process. A free and fair election brings about a democratic government that ultimately ensures happiness and prosperity of the people it governs.

Last but not least, I would like to congratulate the Election Commission of India once again on the occasion of its 60th Anniversary celebration; needless to say that ECI has already shown to the world its wisdom and effective electoral management.

Thank you.

**SYMPOSIUM PAPERS
ON
"INNOVATIVE PRACTICES IN
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