

**Launching event**

**Social protection assessment based national dialogue:**

**Towards a nationally defined social protection floor in Thailand**

*Government House, Friday 10 May 2013*

**The ILO Social Protection Floor Recommendation, No. 202 and objectives of the  
Assessment Based National Dialogue exercise**

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H.E. the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Labour

H.E. the Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development and  
Human Security

H.E. the Secretary General of the National Economic and Social Development Board

Distinguished officials of the Royal Thai Government

Representatives of workers' and employers' organizations

Colleagues from the United Nations and the international development community,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to be here this morning and open this event together with  
such a distinguished panel. Today we have an agenda that goes to the heart of

Thailand's efforts to build a modern and dynamic economy based on equality and inclusiveness.

As you know H.E. the Prime Minister has kindly agreed to deliver a keynote address later this morning. It is a clear demonstration of her political commitment and personal engagement in advancing the National Development agenda. Her words before the UN General Assembly in New York last September [I QUOTE] *"It is important to put the people at the front and centre of the development agenda. Sustainable growth and development, job creation, promoting poverty reduction and equality and addressing climate change must go hand in hand"* [END QUOTE] inspired and guided the work we are presenting today.

What we are celebrating is not just the launch of the report. It is also the accomplishment of the entire fulfilling process of national dialogue.

#### ***----- The Right to Social Security***

A dialogue based on the strong conviction that social security is a human right and a social and economic necessity. It is recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and reflected in Thailand's Constitution.

### *----- The Social Protection Floor*

Establishing social protection floors, respecting the diversity of country situations is about human dignity. It is a basic but essential contribution to reducing poverty, to empowering people but also to expanding aggregate demand.

It is a commitment to a decent society, a platform that enables millions of Thai women, men and children to progress on a sure footing. That is why the notion of floor is so important – not a safety net which you cannot stand on or build from – a floor upon which all individuals can stand to support themselves and their families. This can make a fundamental difference to the lives of millions of Thai people.

Almost a year ago Ministers of Labour and representatives of businesses and labour unions from all over the world convened in Geneva for the International Labour Conference and sent a clear and bold message. Countries around the world shall build social protection floors with essential guarantees for health care and basic income security based on the principles of universality and solidarity. Today, Thailand presents its response.

One issue is undoubtedly central to the national policy debate. We believe that there is broad consensus on the notion that this is a sound concept and a clear necessity. However, the key question is: can Thailand afford it?

After more than two decades of impressive economic growth we believe that Thailand has passed the question of affordability. Your economy is strong enough to provide social protection floors to all. And this is what the analytical work we have done together tells us.

For Thailand this means that all residents – whether they live in a hill tribe in Chiang Rai, or a fishing village near Phuket – should be guaranteed a basic standard of living and a safety net to fall back on in hard times. It means that all children – whether they are the child of migrant workers from Myanmar, or grow up in poverty - should be given a fair chance and an opportunity to reach their full potential. It means that in the context of Thailand’s ageing population, everyone should be guaranteed dignity and support in their old age.

#### *---- The National Development Agenda*

As well as being an important end in itself, an adequate social protection system is also an essential pre-requisite for achieving many of Thailand’s national development priorities. These include:

- Eliminating child labour and achieving universal primary school enrolment will not be possible unless vulnerable families are guaranteed a basic level of income and protected against economic shocks.

- Empowering women and girls will not be possible without state supported care for children and the elderly to relieve them of some of their burdens as informal caregivers.
- Deepening and accelerating economic growth and opportunity will not be possible without healthy, capable and engaged citizens who are guaranteed a basic level of education, healthcare and income support.

Events in Thailand's recent memory – from the catastrophic Tsunami in 2004, to the devastating floods of 2011 – have been a powerful demonstration of the need for adequate social protection. While social protection may not be able to prevent such disasters, it can help to mitigate some of the social and human costs by supporting people to get back on their feet and rebuild their lives and livelihoods.

#### *----- The Assessment Report*

The purpose of the work we are presenting today is to stock of the social protection situation in Thailand. It also helps us to understand how the social protection floor could be made into a reality for all members of Thai society.

We are showing today that the social protection system in Thailand is quite advanced and important achievements have been made. For instance:

- All Thai citizens and some categories of migrant workers have access to health care in Thailand,
- Children have access to free education,
- Various contributory or partially contributory schemes provide protection to the working age group,
- The elderly and people with disabilities are entitled to a minimum living allowance.

However, it is also clear that there are still groups of people who have been left behind by these advances and for whom social protection is still not a reality:

- This includes workers in the informal sector – such as market vendors and subsistence farmers – who have little or no protection in case of sickness, accidents or pregnancy.
- It includes the thousands of child labourers whose families are unable to afford the indirect costs of sending them to school.

#### *---- Vision*

The report also provides concrete recommendations for Thai policy makers on how to reach out to these groups, and sets out a vision for a more inclusive society based on social justice, where:

- All children will have equal opportunities through the introduction of a child support grant and access to child care services,
- All workers in the informal economy will be empowered through regular and adapted training;
- All workers in the informal economy will be better protected notably in case of sickness, accidents and maternity,
- All the elderly and people with disabilities will live in dignity through more adequate pensions,
- A comprehensive long term care system will be designed and established to answer the new challenges faced by an aging society.

What is needed now is the political will to move forward rapidly; to create a transparent, efficient and accountable social security system in the context of a sustainable growth model that incorporates decent work and job creation at the center.

Thank you.

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