

Mr Chairman, excellencies, delegates to the conference, ladies and gentlemen.

I wish to begin by expressing my appreciation to His Excellency the President of Mongolia for inviting me to speak at this Conference of the Community of Democracies.

I accepted this invitation not only because I wanted to visit a country that has made many achievements regarding democracy, or to exchange ideas and views on democracy. But I am here also because democracy is so important to me, and more importantly, to the people of my beloved home, Thailand.

Democracy is not a new concept. Over the years, It has brought progress and hope to a lot of people. At the same time, many people have sacrificed their blood and lives in order to protect and build a democracy.

A government of the people, by the people and for the people does not come without a price. Rights, liberties and the belief that all men and women are created equal have to be fought, and sadly, died for.

Why? This is because there are people in this world who do not believe in democracy. They are ready to grab power and wealth through suppression of freedom. This means that they are willing to take advantage of other people without respecting human rights and liberties. They use force to gain submission and abuse the power. This happened in the past and still posed challenges for all of us in the present.

In many countries, democracy has taken a firm root. And it is definitely refreshing to see another wave of democracy in modern times, from Arab Spring to the successful transition in Myanmar through the efforts of President Thein Sein, and also the changes in my own country where the people power in Thailand has brought me here today.

At the regional level, the key principles in the ASEAN Charter are the commitment to rule of law, democracy and constitutional government. However, we must always beware that anti-democratic forces never subside. Let me share my story.

In 1997, Thailand had a new constitution that was created through the participation from the people. Because of this, we all thought a new era

of democracy has finally arrived, an era without the cycle of coups d'état.

It was not to be. An elected government which won two elections with a majority was overthrown in 2006. Thailand lost track and the people spent almost a decade to regain their democratic freedom.

Many of you here know that the government I am talking about was the one with my brother, Thaksin Shinawatra, as the rightfully elected Prime Minister.

Many who don't know me say that why complain? It is a normal process that governments come and go. And if I and my family were the only ones suffering, I might just let it be.

But it was not. Thailand suffered a setback and lost international credibility. Rule of law in the country was destroyed. Projects and programmes started by my brother's government that came from the people's wishes were removed. The people felt their rights and liberties were wrongly taken away.

Thai means free, and the people of Thailand fought back for their freedom. In May 2010, a crackdown on the protestors, the Red Shirts Movement, led to 91 deaths in the heart of the commercial district of Bangkok.

Many innocent people were shot dead by snipers, and the movement crushed with the leaders jailed or fled abroad. Even today, many political victims remain in jail.

However, the people pushed on, and finally the government then had to call for an election, which they thought could be manipulated. In the end, the will of people cannot be denied. I was elected with an absolute majority.

But the story is not over. It is clear that elements of anti-democratic regime still exist. The new constitution, drafted under the coup leaders led government, put in mechanisms to restrict democracy.

A good example of this is that half of the Thai Senate is elected, but the other half is appointed by a small group of people. In addition, the so called independent agencies have abused the power that should belong to the people, for the benefit of the few rather than to the Thai society at large.

This is the challenge of Thai democracy. I would like to see reconciliation and democracy gaining strength. This can only be achieved through strengthening of the rule of law and due process.

Only then will every person from all walks of life can feel confident that they will be treated fairly. I announced this as part of the government policy at Parliament before I fully assumed my duties as Prime Minister.

Moreover, democracy will also promote political stability, providing an environment for investments, creating more jobs and income. And most importantly, I believe political freedom addresses long term social disparities by opening economic opportunities that would lead to reducing the income gap between the rich and the poor.

That is why it is so important to strengthen the grassroots. We can achieve this through education reforms. Education creates opportunities through knowledge, and democratic culture built into the ways of life of the people.

Only then will the people have the knowledge to be able to make informed choices and defend their beliefs from those wishing to suppress them. That is why Thailand supported Mongolia's timely UNGA resolution on education for democracy.

Also important is closing gaps between rich and poor. Everyone should be given opportunities and no one should be left behind. This will allow the people to become an active stakeholder in building the country's economy and democracy.

That is why my Government initiated policies to provide the people with the opportunities to make their own living and contribute to the development of our society. Some of these include creating the Women Development Fund, supporting local products and SMEs as well as help raising income for the farmers.

And I believe you need effective and innovative leadership. Effective in implementing rule of law fairly. Innovative in finding creative peaceful solutions to address the problems of the people.

You need leadership not only on the part of governments but also on the part of the opposition and all stakeholders. All must respect the rule of law and contribute to democracy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Another important lesson we have learnt was that international friends matter. Pressure from countries who value democracy kept democratic forces in Thailand alive. Sanctions and non-recognition are essential mechanisms to stop anti-democratic regimes.

An international forum like Community of Democracies helps sustain democracy, seeking to promote and protect democracy through

dialogue and cooperation. More importantly, if any country took the wrong turn against the principle of democracy, all of us here need to unite to pressure for change and return freedom to the people.

I will always support the Community of Democracies and the work of the Governing Council. I also welcome the President's Asian Partnership Initiative for Democracy and will explore how to extend our cooperation with it.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to end my statement by declaring that, I hope that the sufferings of my family, the families of the political victims, and the families of the 91 people, who lost their lives in defending democracy during the bloodshed in May 2010, will be the last.

Let us continue to support democracy so that the rights and liberties of all human beings will be protected for future generations to come!

Thank you.