

**Keynote speech on
'Public Policy of Happiness'**

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Your Excellencies, Distinguished guests and Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sawad-dee krub thuk than. This is an everyday greeting in Thai language which simply means 'May you all be happy!' Perhaps, this is why Thailand came to be the least miserable country in the world once again according to the Bloomberg's Misery Index 2017 and ranking 32 Happiest country in the world according to the latest World Happiness Report 2017.

How about you this morning? Are you all happy to attend this Happiness convention? If you are not so sure about it, please turn yourself toward your next person right and left and give him/her an innocent smile and greet him and her with a word *sawadee* or may you be happy! A smile is a simple indication of happiness but it is so contagious that it can make everyone smile and be happy without any serious effort and purpose.

When I was a young novice my master once gave me some practical advice. Every morning, he asked me to do first thing even before I brushed my teeth was to look in the mirror and smile to myself.

'Master!' I protested. 'I don't want to look at my sleepy and moody face the first thing in the morning. Some morning, I would be frightened to look at myself in a mirror, let alone smile!'

He compassionately advised, "If you cannot manage a natural smile, then take your two index fingers, place one on each corner of your mouth, and push up. Like this." And he showed me.

He looked ridiculous, I giggled. He ordered me to try it. So I did.

In the next morning, I tried but natural smile was a nonstarter. So I took my two index fingers, placed one on each corner of my mouth, pushed up. I then saw this stupid young novice making a silly face in the mirror, and I couldn't help grinning. Once there was a natural smile, I saw the novice in the mirror smiling at me. So I smiled back even more. The man in mirror smiled back even more. In a few second, we ended up laughing together in happiness.

We can try the two-fingers trick any time of the day. It is especially useful when we feel sick, fed up, or downright depressed. Laughter has been proven to release endorphins into our bloodstream, which strengthens our immune system and make us feel happy.

Well, it is a quite nostalgic for me to be back here again after 5 years of initiative work we did on the Happiness Summit. In 2012, I was invited to be a panelist at the High-

Level Meeting on The Economic Paradigm: Happiness and Well-being by the then Prime Minister of Bhutan. It was the first UN High Level Meeting on Happiness ever held. We all knew that it was the first time in our history that UN got interested on things like happiness although it has been the ultimate goal of everyone in this planet. I guess, better late than never!

I am so happy that one of the suggestions we made from that summit is finally materialized in a global scale i.e. the International Happiness Day with the leading initiation of this esteem UN Organization.

Happiness could mean 100 things for 100 people but it is something everyone is yearning for. Some say happiness is something personal and private cannot be measured. Many times on a process of pursuit of happiness we are fooled by happiness! Imagine how have we grown ourselves. When you were a child the parents and teachers advised you not to waste your time in playing ground but to stay at home instead giving the time to your homework although it was against your happiness. They explained how important the schooling and that if you did well, then you would be happy. This act of pursuit for happiness goes on in your life nonstop by saying if you did well in college, university, job, marriage and so on then you would be happy.

Finally, before you retired, and certainly after, you started becoming religious and going to church. Have you ever noticed how many old people occupy the pews in a church? Once I asked them why they were now going to church. They told me. "Because, when I die, then I will be happy!"

For those who believe that "When I get this, then I'll be happy," their happiness will be just a dream in the future.

It will be like a rainbow one or two steps ahead, but forever just out of reach. They will never in their life, or after, realize happiness.

Therefore, if you want to be happy, act now, experience here and now.

Once I was approached by a very sad man and requested 'I want happiness.' As a Buddhist monk, I simply calm him down and tell him to do things step by step. Sir, first remove 'I' that's ego. Then remove 'want,' that's desire. That person starred at me doubtfully. Then I asked him what is left now? He burst in laughing and answered 'Happiness'. Then I said, 'blessed you! You have just found what you are pursuing for.'

Therefore, Happiness is sometime no need to be pursuit for. It is within us from the day we were born. Don't need much for a newly born child to smile at you with happiness. Unlike us who has grown up and we totally forgot that we were born with the quality of happiness and now ended up pursuing for it.

I love the Sanskrit word for happiness i.e. *sukha*. Etymologically, it simply means 'ease,' the very capacity of human being able to change one's mindset to be at ease. On the contrary, the word *dukkha* simply means 'dis-ease' or the very weakness of human being that can't stand with the situation.

Therefore, happiness is something innate to human being but it is blocked by our wrong way of life and wrong perception of things.

The true happiness has two faces: material and mental happiness. To be genuinely happy we need to be balanced both with material and mental happiness. In action, I guess this is what the UN has announced as our global agenda as Sustainable Development Goals.

In another world, SDGs is a means to a genuine happiness. In simplification, I would say with **SDG** it makes us **GLEE**. **G** for good life, **L** for liberty, **E** for economic security and another **E** for enjoyment of wealth. These are the core values which makes everyone of us happy. This is something every government should develop as a basis of all public policies.

Although happiness may seem a private matter but it is also a result of a public policy. We become who we are in subject to another man whom we interact with. Therefore, national government is directly responsible for happiness of her population. In Sanskrit, the etymology of king or modern word for government is someone who creates happiness for his subject. In another word, the very task of the government is to secure happiness for every single people in the country. So as a government do we ever give priority in our national policy to happiness above anything else?

Today, I am so happy to sit with Her Excellency Ms. Chood Al Roumi who is the Minister for Happiness. I wish every government has this position and gear the whole cabinet policy with the guidance from this ministry so that we can materialize the public policy of happiness.

In addition to the International Day of Happiness, one other suggestion we submitted at 2012 Happiness summit was the very public policy of happiness. We were suggesting that we should establish a happiness bank for a public benefit. This could be done both through a government or NGO. This bank's work is to encourage communities to do small things which can assure communal happiness with communal initiatives anywhere in the world.

Naturally, world faces unstoppable changes so it is the government's public policy to secure happiness amidst the changing world. In modern term, we have to ask our government to be serious in taking action of applying SDGs in real life not just in a paper. Of course, the application of SDGs may vary in details according to each culture but the ultimate result should be the happiness of people. Once we can create an individual happiness it surely radiates to global happiness in no time because happiness is contagious in a good way.

As a Thai, I would like to share with you that Thailand has been working hard to achieve happiness through SDGs not only to respond to the UN agenda but we have been developing the public policy of happiness a long ago even before the UN has announced the SDG. Thailand has developed her own version of SDG which is popularly known as the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP). SEP was the graceful legacy of the Late His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who was recognized by the UN as the Development King.

The heart of SEP is the public happiness which radiate out of individual happiness. When the late Thai king developed the idea of *sethakit phorphiang* or sufficiency economy he was pointing out that what are the noble activities which can create happiness for all. The term *phorphiang* or as it is translated in English as sufficiency is indeed a synonym for happiness whereas *sethakit* or as it is translated in English as economy etymologically

means a noble action similar to English etymology of economy as a management of household.

Therefore, the SEP is a tool of how to become happy and how can we change our world to be a happier place on earth. The simple formula of SEP is to act according to 3S:

1. **Sanity:** Normally, basis of humanness is an aspiration for self-happiness in subject to communal happiness. In another word, we were normally born happy but in due course we lost that quality. Therefore, we should introspect the factors which destroyed the factor of happiness and restore the sanity back. We can reactivate our sanity by changing our perspective to our life in a more balanced manner.
2. **Spirituality:** We are living in a fragile world of impermanence. Therefore, to able to live happily in this rapidly changing world we need to develop quality of resiliency. In another word, develop the very mindfulness. We can find scientific benefits of mindfulness in every field of life. This will able to make us resilience in every aspect of our life and able to minimize all unhappiness factors. Resiliency is a direct outcome of development of spirituality.
3. **Sustainability:** Every phenomenon in this world has its own reason. Develop the very wisdom that we can see through those cause and effect. Accordingly, we are able to identify the cause of happiness and develop those causes to boost up happiness in our life. In fact, the term *sustain* from its etymology simply means ‘upholding from the ground.’ Therefore, the whole wisdom of sustainability is to make progress in balance that it does not produce any negative side effects to the cause of happiness as a byproduct. Let alone social, economic and environment.

In summary, what the late Thai King has proposed and proved by his own experiments was to apply the tri-principles of sanity, spirituality, and sustainability with all public policies for happiness in order to achieve a sustainable happiness. In other word, this is a simple mantra of global happiness and a simple key to achieve SDGs for happiness.

May we all be happy on this International Day of Happiness and forever!

Thank you.