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Address on ACD Progress (Report of the ACD Coordinator) by

H.E. Kasit Piromya

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand

The Inaugural Ceremony of the Eighth Asia Cooperation Dialogue

Colombo, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

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Your Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa,

President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka,

Your Honourable Rohitha Bogollagama,

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka,

Distinguished Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me at the outset to congratulate His Excellency the President and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka on the Chairmanship of the Asia Cooperation Dialogue. May I as well extend my congratulations to the people of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka on the

success of the ACD Ministerial Meeting on the Sidelines of the 64th Session of the United Nations General Assembly held in New York last month. Let me also express my sincere appreciation for the warm hospitality and excellent arrangements made for the meeting today in Colombo.

Excellencies,

As ACD Coordinator, I have the honour to deliver a brief report on the progress that the ACD has made since the conclusion of the Seventh ACD Ministerial Meeting held in Astana in October last year.

The highlight of the past year is unquestionably our continued efforts to fortify Asia's competitiveness. As evident in the Progress Reports presented here before us, member countries have volunteered to organize activities in areas of e-Education, Energy, Environmental Education, Road Safety, Poverty Alleviation, IT Development and SME Development. Although not robust in number, these cooperation projects have proven to be constructive gatherings where we shared our good practices and sought solutions to common challenges.

No less important is our attempt to consolidate the idea of "cobwebs or clusters of cooperation," a concept initiated at the High-Level Study Group Meeting and later endorsed at the ACD 7. The most recent example, and indeed a promising one, is the discussion we had yesterday at the Prime and Co-Prime Movers Consultation on a cluster of trade, tourism and transport.

Excellencies,

Our efforts to advance our cooperation shall not end here. Less than three weeks from now, China will hold another series of its *Seminar on Theory and*

Practice of International Development (Poverty Reduction) for Asian Countries. India is then due to hold an *ACD Think Tanks Network Meeting* in February 2010. Kazakhstan has as well proposed to host *the ACD Transport Forum* while Pakistan has begun a preparation for *the 2nd ACD Energy Forum*. Also next year, Thailand will deliver the first series of the ACD Cultural Compendium.

Excellencies,

Culture and connectivity are closely intertwining. In the past, we had the Silk Route that did not only physically link Asia together but also help promote understanding, cooperation and tolerance among us. I believe that such architecture and such knowledge of our shared heritage and culture are with no doubt essential in reuniting Asia and, consequently, cementing the ACD. The 21st century is thus *the* time to reconnect our past and present, to rejoin this ancient Silk Route of tolerance and cooperation by all means necessary—intellectually, culturally and scientifically.

Excellencies,

Future success of the ACD requires a collective effort. In face of multiple global challenges—ranking from the current economic calamity to the spread of the H1N1 influenza, we may have understandably diverted our attention from regional cooperation to focus primarily on domestic issues at hands. I wish such a tendency would only be temporary. Difficulties at this global scale certainly entail cooperative efforts. While I take this opportunity to thank member countries for the progress they have made possible during the past year, allow me also to encourage us all to actively participate in this Asian-wide forum, to further enhance our growing sense of ownership and belonging to one Asian community.

Thank you.