

Statement by
Hon. Mr. SURACHAI LIENGBOONLERTCHAI
First Vice-President, National Legislative Assembly of Thailand
“Rejuvenating Democracy: Giving Voice to Youth”,
134th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union
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1. Mr. President,
Distinguished Delegates,
2. A very wise man, Mahatma Gandhi, said to us many years ago that “democracy is something that gives the weak the same chance as the strong”. More importantly, he told us that “the spirit of democracy cannot be imposed from without, rather it has to come from within.”
3. These are very profound words which lead me to the thematic topic that we are discussing here today.
4. Currently, Thailand is reforming to transition our country to the path of national reconciliation in order to realize a genuine democracy. I would like to emphasize the word “genuine” because the past decades have taught us that democracy is much more than just elections. Elections that are considered democratic have to be free and fair.
5. How is this relevant to our thematic topic of “Rejuvenating Democracy: Giving Voice to Youth”?

6. We look to the wise words of Mr. Gandhi for guidance – “the spirit of democracy has to come from within”. To instill the desired principles and values of genuine democracy there is no better place to start than with our children, the youth, the young generation.

7. The 122nd IPU Assembly in Bangkok had a resolution of “youth participation in the democratic process” highlighting youth having political rights, promote knowledge and participation in political activities in the democratic system. Currently, in the year 2016, such matters come again as the theme of our conference.

8. Thailand and the National Legislative Assembly are trying to do this. We are preparing the groundwork and strengthening the foundation for a genuine democracy in Thailand. We are trying hard to re-establish and ensure that the desired principles, values and mindset for our youth that is the bedrock of the country’s new democracy for them to have the spirit of democracy come from within.

9. Last year, at the NLA, we have launched the “**Democratic Youth**” Project. The Project which has now involved hundreds of participants between the age of 15 to 20 years old from around the country aims to instill greater understanding of democratic principles and how they work among Thai youth among other projects.

10. On top of these initiatives, there are many existing laws such as the **Child Protection Act** (2003) and the **Promotion of Child and Youth Development Act** (2007). Thus far, Thailand has also signed and ratified

numerous international conventions and instruments, most importantly, the **Convention on the rights of the Child** (1989).

11. For us, genuine and sustainable democracy can only be achieved through the process of social integration and national reconciliation. People from all walks of life, from all economic and social segments, especially, women, children and the underprivileged, should be empowered to participate in this process. They all should have the right to be involved in political affairs.

12. In order to achieve this goal, we wish to count on the continued support from our IPU colleagues and the international community. At the same time, I would like to take this opportunity to confirm that we also continue to cooperate with IPU and Members of IPU. We believe that we are on the right path. And I am confident that very soon the people of Thailand will feel in their hearts “the spirit of democracy” that truly come from their conscious.

13. Thank you very much for your kind attention.