

**Welcome Speech by
His Excellency Mr. Weerasak Kowsurat
Minister of Tourism and Sports
On the occasion of the Opening Ceremony
91st Lions Clubs International 2008
Wednesday 25 June 2008, at 08.45 hrs.
Challenger 1 Impact Muangthong**

Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Royal Thai Government and Thailand's tourism industry, it is my great honour and privilege to address you on this very special occasion, the opening ceremony for the Ninety-First (91st) Lions Clubs International Convention which takes place here in Bangkok from 23-27 June, 2008.

Allow me to start by thanking the Lions Clubs International for choosing Thailand as the venue for this event, the largest in the history of the Lions Clubs International. We are confident that the trust you have placed in Thailand will be amply rewarded in the days to come.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Lions Clubs is a strong, vibrant and much-loved institution with a long and venerable history in Thailand, and before I go on, I would like to offer a very humble thanks on behalf of the Government of Thailand to each and every Lion and Lioness present here, for bringing your warmth,

your generosity and your spirit to share with us here in Thailand. It is truly a privilege to be here amongst you all, and I believe this event will help us all to reflect on what more we can do personally, each and every day, to help our fellow men.

Well, as you all know, Thailand is world-famous as a dream tourist destination. Please allow me to share a few words about the prospects for the tourism industry here in Thailand, and what we are doing to try to ensure that as our tourism industry grows, it embraces the three principles of good governance, environmental responsibility and sustainable development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Tourism is a top priority for our government as we always know that investing in tourism activities will bring significant benefits to the country. And when I speak about “benefits”, I do not only mean financial ones. A responsible tourism industry has the potential to help people improve their skills by learning how to deliver a better service or a better management of human and environmental resources.

And that is the reason why the vision of the Ministry of Tourism and Sports is to establish Thailand as the hub of tourism in Asia, emphasizing high quality and - especially- sustainability. We want tourism income to accrue to, and remain within local communities in order to improve equity

of income distribution, and this of course is the reason for our current focus on eco-tourism, which puts our guests in close touch with traditional Thai customs, lifestyles and culture, at the same time creating stability and local employment within rural communities.

And when I talk about tourism, of course, I refer also to the very closely interlinked MICE sector. Thailand's MICE sector has enjoyed double digit growth for the past 8 years, and with a substantial investment in infrastructure, new venue facilities, and streamlined 'one-stop' support for MICE operators provided with the help of the dedicated Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau, or TCEB, the boom seems definitely set to continue.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With the development of the "Royal Coast" along the Gulf of Thailand from Chanthaburi to Pattaya, Hua Hin and up to Samut Prakan near Bangkok, we want to offer an impressive setting for major investments in tourism as well as MICE events. However, I am very conscious that those developments should follow strict guidelines to preserve our environment and natural resources. I have already asked the Board of Investment to facilitate investment in environment-friendly, sustainable tourism and MICE developments. We would like to see the Royal Coast developed sensitively, in order to serve as a model for our

future tourism development by creating high quality tourism products, whilst embracing a sense of preservation for the environment.

As we look into the future, however, we realise that we will have to become somewhat more conservative in our future growth plans. This will require us to stress quality over quantity, a policy that we feel will become even more important worldwide. That is why we are proud to be the home of one of the world's most effective ways of environmental conservation - the Sufficiency Economy concept championed by His Majesty the King.

In conclusion, Ladies and Gentlemen, on behalf of the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, and the people of Thailand, I would like to offer our thanks and congratulations to all those involved in convening, supporting and organizing this event, and especially to TCEB which has made an outstanding contribution to building a world-class MICE industry here in Thailand.

Most of all I would like to thank you all, members of Lions Clubs from all around the world for coming to Thailand, and for your unwavering dedication to helping the less fortunate among humankind. I wish you a productive and memorable Lions Clubs International Convention 2008, and am confident that you will enjoy your stay here to the full. Please take advantage of the diversity of cultural, culinary and leisure opportunities that Thailand has to offer, and I look forward to welcoming you back to Thailand again very soon as our honoured guests.

Thank you.
