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Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and great pleasure for me to represent Thailand at this 2009 Asia Cultural Co-operation Forum (ACCF). Allow me to convey the warmest greetings of the Minister of Culture of Thailand, to our host and all delegates participating at this Forum and his best wishes for a fruitful and successful outcome. I also wish to take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation to the Home Affairs Bureau of Hong Kong for the warm hospitality extended to me and my delegation upon our arrival.

I am particularly delighted to experience the liveliness and dynamism of Hong Kong and its people at this time of the year. Hong Kong is a showcase of a cosmopolitan city where the arts and culture continue to thrive and flourish alongside a very energetic business environment. This is what makes Hong Kong exciting, nurtures social progress and creativity in its people and keeps it at the leading edge of global business.

Thailand also takes great pride in our own rich and diverse cultural heritage, nurtured and sustained over many centuries and appreciated today by people all over the world. The Thai Government's policies and actions recognise arts and culture as a national strength and source of the Thai people's resilience, creativity, openness and tolerance that need to be preserved, promoted and developed. As arts and culture also represent a door to the heart and soul of nations, we in Thailand also support inter-cultural dialogue within and among nations to promote greater understanding and appreciation.

Indeed, the promotion of arts and culture is particularly important for all of us in Asia in today's age and time. Asia was once a cradle for the world's great philosophies, civilisations, inventions, artistic expressions and cultural heritages that served to link and bind peoples in this part of the world. After a long period of lapse, it is now making its way back into the world's arts and cultural scene, through the fashion, entertainment, media and tourism industries. There is every expectation that Asia will serve as an engine for the world's economic growth in the 21st century. Today, Asia, with all its diversities, is gradually and steadily moving towards closer integration,

especially here in East Asia. At the same time, Asia lies at the crossroads of globalisation where peoples stand to benefit from greater opportunities, but where the younger generations are becoming more disconnected from their cultural heritages.

It is therefore critical for all of us in Asia to cooperate, coordinate, work together, share experiences and help each other promote Asia's arts and culture, not only within our region, but also to the world community. We should use this Forum, as well as other frameworks such as ASEAN, APEC and UNESCO, to engage in dialogue and promote appreciation and understanding of Asia's cultural diversity.

In this regard, the Thai delegation appreciates the various points identified by the ACCF to promote cooperation in arts and culture. We wish to offer some ideas to further enhance and guide our cooperation. Firstly, we should always try to strike the right balance between promoting traditional and contemporary arts and culture. Our efforts to preserve and protect our cultural heritage should not be compromised by our efforts to promote cultural development, especially in the age of the globalisation and the Internet. Secondly, in view of the diversity in the region, special emphasis should be given to the learning process, enhancing better understanding and developing the human potential. This would not only promote appreciation of the region's rich cultural diversity, but also raise the region's capacity in creativity and provide an appropriate role for arts and culture in economic development.

As I mentioned earlier, Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates, arts and culture represent the door to a nation's heart and soul. Therefore, let us use this Forum to open the door to each other and enable our peoples to reach out to each other's heart and soul. Thank you for your kind attention.