Intervention by

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At HLPF 2017 Side Event “Accelerating Women’s Economic Empowerment to Achieve the 2010 Agenda”

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At the outset, I wish to thank the group for the UNSG’s High-Level Panel Report on Women’s Economic Empowerment. The recommendations of the Report have served as practical guidelines to advance our efforts in enhancing women’s economic empowerment.

Thailand is proud to be participating in this group of Champions of Economic Empowerment of Women, and as the only ASEAN country in this group, wishes to share some experiences on this important issue from a regional perspective.

We cannot talk about building a people-centered ASEAN Community that leaves no one behind, if we do not also address the important issue of closing gender gaps, especially in participation in economic development. One estimate made by McKinsey Global Institute is that if men and women played an identical role in labour markets, as much as 28 trillion US dollars or 26 percent could be added to the global GDP by 2025\(^1\).

Despite clear ASEAN aspirations to close such gender gaps, fewer women than men are present in the labour markets of ASEAN today. Indeed, the average gender gap in the labour force participation rate is about 19 percent\(^2\). Fortunately,

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\(^2\) ASEAN Secretariat, UN Women and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung “Projected Gender Impact of the ASEAN Economic Community”, June 2016.
this has been partly offset by the rising trend of women playing an increasing role as owners and entrepreneurs, especially in micro, small and medium enterprises level.

To overcome this challenge, Thailand, as ASEAN Coordinator on sustainable development, has been working in close partnership with ASEAN countries and organizations, such as UN Women and the World Bank, to push forward the economic empowerment of women agenda. This agenda is being treated as a top priority regional catalyst to help attain multiple SDGs simultaneously -- from Goal 5 on gender equality to Goal 8 on decent work and economic growth and Goal 10 on reduced inequalities, in tandem with pursuing regional integration efforts.

In concrete terms, there are plans to undertake the following, in cooperation with various stakeholders:

- First, reduce the education and skills gap to support women to participate in high-growth and trade-oriented sectors;
- Second, Promote women’s entrepreneurship by ensuring equal access to market and finance;
- Third, ensure availability of social protection to address women’s poverty and reduce income inequality;
- Fourth, expand quality and access of social services to reduce the drudgery of unpaid care and domestic work and support women’s economic participation.
- Fifth, review trade and migration policies from a gender perspective since women migrants form the largest share of migrants in some ASEAN Member States.

Our next step is to hold a dialogue among ASEAN, UN Women, and potential global and regional stakeholders in identifying the national and regional catalysts for women’s economic empowerment in ASEAN.

The main goal is to support gender mainstreaming and women’s empowerment into the mutually reinforcing processes of building a vibrant and sustainable ASEAN Community, on the one hand, and attaining the SDGs so that no one is left behind, on the other.