



AIT

Asian Institute of Technology

118th Graduation Ceremony
Tuesday, 18th December 2012

Address by Professor Said Irandoust
AIT President

AIT Conference Center Auditorium

H.E. Mr. Nopadol Gunavibool, Chairman of the AIT Board of Trustees and Deputy Permanent Secretary,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand
Excellencies and honored guests, partners,
Members of the AIT alumni, faculty, staff,
Our dear graduands and family members.

A very warm welcome to all of you !

A special welcome also to our graduation speaker Ms. Carrie Thompson, the Acting Mission Director, of the USAID Regional Development Mission of Asia. AIT's roots began with strong US support more than 50 years ago as part of the United States' strong engagement and support for education and development in the Asia-Pacific region. It's a delight that on the very first graduation ceremony held back on this campus since last years' floods, a representative from the United States is also back here with us. My hope is that U.S. support will be further strengthened as AIT and the region continue to move forward.

I would like to offer my heartiest congratulations and best wishes to the 118th batch of students graduating today. All of us are aware of the difficulties and challenges that you and all the AIT community have had to endure in the aftermath of last year's floods. It demanded sacrifices, learning to cope with the unexpected and being true to oneself on so many different levels. These are what matter and eventually count in the long run.

This past year also saw people fighting for your allegiances, seeking to win you to this cause or this viewpoint. But through it all, you were able to focus on your studies to make it to graduation today. I applaud your fortitude, your strength and your wisdom.

I would also like to ask that you join me and others in applauding the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand for working with me and members of the AIT Board of Trustees and Representatives of sovereign states that have already ratified the new AIT Charter, in putting to rest some of our Thai students' concerns as to whether or not your degrees granted today are indeed valid in Thailand. To that question, and as I promised, the answer is a resounding yes. That's double reason for celebration.

Today we do not just celebrate the first steps of a way forward for AIT, as I called for in my open letter to our AIT community. We celebrate your own first steps forward as new graduates, as new alumni and I hope as new donors and supporters to an even stronger, international AIT. An AIT where future students will meet students and faculty not just from Thailand, or southeast or south Asia, but from around the world.

Whether we like it or not, our world is not limited to our immediate surroundings and old boy networks. A world of challenge and opportunity is out there.

As you yourselves begin your own paths forward, perhaps there is a lesson here about the importance of pragmatism and a focus on the future. We are honored that during the transition period until Thailand ratifies the new charter that AIT will be governed by the board of trustees and under the chairmanship of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, which is also the depository to the new AIT charter.

Allow me here to thank the faculty, students, staff and alumni for their quiet support through difficult times. Many have worked behind the scenes to support my efforts for a way forward, untainted by disharmony and discord, including some of you students here. Allow me to share one quote from a

longtime friend of AIT. His words have great meaning not just to AIT but for each of you, each of us, as we move forward in a rapidly changing world.

“AIT had suffered a lot during this transition period. At last, we see some light at the end of the long tunnel. It is not about ‘my way’ or ‘your way’, but it was about seeking out ‘our way’ that will be good for an international academic institution like AIT. Beyond conflict and compromise, we all should try to unveil a radical way of ‘thinking’ that represents the supreme opportunity of our time. We must set aside our differences, including our limited boundaries, languages, politics and cultures and work in hand in hand together to create solutions which are greater than the problems we now face. This is a wise and welcome echo of Einstein’s warning that ‘the problems we are facing today cannot be solved by the same level of thinking that created them.’”

Now is a time, with the New Year soon upon us, to move forward. This is a time for moving forward and for reconciliation and transition that would help put in additional steps for a stronger AIT -- something now possible but only if people come together. I ask you to keep this in mind as you too become proud alumni of AIT.

There is much hard work to be done. AIT’s future will be shaped by self and national interests of AIT's most important stakeholders. In these last 7 years under my administration's watch and the guidance of partner governments and board members including distinguished Thai personalities such as H.E. Khun Anand and H. E. Dr. Tej, to name a few, we have seen AIT move forward in line with AIT’s long-term strategy, a plan to make AIT stronger and more international.

While this vision may well now change, my hope, which I know is shared by many alumni and others, is that tomorrow's AIT will not simply be an attempt to recreate a past long gone. Instead it will be an AIT where all of us, regardless of nationality, and governments, regardless of party, will once again attract the support of students, governments, alumni and other stakeholders in Asia and beyond. There is a saying that *"revolution is easy, evolution is hard."* Perhaps that applies here today at AIT.

AIT is truly honored, proud and grateful to have been hosted by Thailand over the past 53 years and for the strong and continued support it has received, including from members of the royal family. As we celebrate His Majesty the King of Thailand’s auspicious 85th birthday, please allow me to share His Majesty’s words of wisdom and advice, which are also truly applicable to AIT's case. His majesty’s words: *"I always believe that your compassion and good wishes to one another will be a significant factor in creating a unifying force in any group and also in the country. The most important thing is that there must be no conflicts. Support each other as is needed to achieve goals for the benefit of the people."*

I hope that your future endeavors will resonate with commitment to developing yourselves further in every respect as a person, to making the quality of lives of your people and of the world, better, and to helping people less fortunate than yourselves to realize their potential. It is for these worthy purposes for which you have been prepared and equipped.

From floods to protests, your time at AIT has been an eventful one. My hope, my belief, is that you will have emerged stronger and smarter because of this -- better able now to voice your own views and to map your own futures.

Thank you and congratulations once again!