

**Opening Statement by H.E. Dr. Sai Mauk Kham
Vice President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar**

His Excellency the Under Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP, Dr. Noeleen Heyzer

Excellencies the Union Ministers and Deputy Ministers of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar,

Government Officials,

Ambassadors of ASEAN, BIMSTEC and Donor Countries in Myanmar,

Representatives from International Organizations, UN agencies and INGOS,

Distinguished Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed an honor and privilege for me to deliver the opening address at the “Third Development Partnership Forum on Improving Rice Policies for National and Regional Food Security” jointly organized by the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP).

I would like to warmly welcome Dr. Noeleen Heyzer, Under-Secretary-General of UN and Executive Secretary of UNESCAP for her presence here today.

Today's seminar is noted to be the third of its series on development partnership between Myanmar and UNESCAP.

The first Myanmar –UNESCAP Development Partnership Seminar was held in July 2009, which was the launching of the UNESCAP's Regional Study on Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security in Asia and the Pacific.

Moreover, the second Myanmar - UNESCAP Development Partnership Seminar on “Economic Policies for Growth and Poverty Reduction: Lessons from the Region and Beyond” was also held in December 2009 and national and international experts have discussed and exchanged views on the topics.

In this context, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to UNESCAP for the collaboration in conducting the development partnership seminars.

The main objective of the today's Third Development Partnership Seminar is to share experiences on the theme on “Improving Rice Policies for National and Regional Food Security”.

Myanmar was a rice major exporting country in the world in the past. In the late 1962, the development of the agriculture sector was slow because of the Socialist Economic Planning System. In 2003, the government changed the rice policy in accord with the market economic system, which allowed the private sector to produce and trade rice freely. Moreover, the government rice mills were also privatized. Therefore, it gives more opportunities for the development of agriculture sector and the increase in rice production. However, due to the world climate change and Cyclone Nargis, it slightly affected the Myanmar rice production. In order to compete, the market, the quality of rice and production are the challenges, which we are facing now. Therefore, we are endeavoring to improve the socio-economic development of the farmers through the development and utilization of modern varieties and the improvement in production.

During this seminar the national and international experts as well as the officials from the concerned Ministries will present the papers on the topics on enhancing productivity, trade and well beings of farmers and vulnerability groups in rural areas, lessons learned from the ESCAP Region and Beyond and actions plan for technical cooperation in agriculture sector.

In Myanmar, rural people who make up about 70% of the population are the main working force, and the majority of them engage in agricultural and livestock farming. Therefore, boosting production of goods and economic development of rural areas is the engine of national economic development. Only with economic development of rural areas, will there be alleviation of poverty.

The world is facing many challenges such as financial crisis, climate change, food security and rise in demand for energy. For Myanmar, an agro-based country, we are working hard for the development of the agricultural and livestock breeding sector of rural areas, mitigation and adaption to climate change, food security, higher incomes of rural people and poverty alleviation.

We also have to keep in touch with the pros and cons and challenges in the agricultural and livestock breeding sector for sustainable development. The State Peace and Development Council has constructed a large number of dams, roads, bridges, designated 24 regions for special development and adopted the five rural development programs, which are fundamental for rural development and alleviation of poverty.

As a result, peasants can boost production of not only rice but also cash crops such as beans and pulses are enjoying higher incomes. According to the data and statistics about Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) realized by the UNDP and relevant department, the indexes of poverty were declining in Myanmar.

However, in terms of the social status of peasants, production costs are still unnecessarily high; profits remain unsatisfactory due to low productivity and poor quality; the population is growing; and living costs are going up. So, we have yet to overcome these hindrances to poverty alleviation of rural people.

Accordingly, our new government needs to hold talks with economic experts, organizations and departments to find out how we should deal with this demanding task and what programs we should lay down. In doing so, the National Level Workshop on Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation was held in Nay Pyi Taw which last for (3) days, in May this year, with the five topics: i.e. agriculture development, reduced production costs and technology development, livestock, fisheries and integrated farming development, rural industrial development, small industries and long term rural development and cottage sector and rural economic development.

The workshop was attended by Myanmar economic experts, retired ambassadors, economists/ professors from Universities of Economics, businessmen, Union Ministers and departmental heads. It was an extensive meeting as all the attendees cordially and openly discussed their economic views and experiences in conformity with prevailing conditions.

After collecting the points included in the discussions, we will drawn up the Action Plan that include what we should do, what we must do and what we could do for the rural development and poverty alleviation and the Union Level Central Committee, Working Committee, Region and State Level Committees will be formed accordingly to carry out the tasks.

Before I conclude my opening remarks, I would like to stress that holding of the today's Seminar is the right time and I believe that the outcomes of this Seminar will contribute to the income generation of the farmers through increasing rice production in the agriculture sector which is the major sector of Myanmar and the food security of national and region as well.

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