

Remarks by
H.E. Dr. Kantathi Suphamongkhon
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand
on the Occasion of the Signing of the Air Transport Agreement
between the Government of the United States of America
and the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand
Monday 19 September 2005, Washington, D.C.

Prime Minister Thaksin,
Secretary Mineta,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you Secretary Mineta for your warm welcome and kind remarks. It is an honour and privilege for me to join you in signing, on behalf of the Royal Thai Government, the Air Transport Agreement between Thailand and the United States of America.

As you know, our two countries signed in 2003 the Protocol to the Air Service Agreement to liberalize air cargo services. The Agreement that we have just signed will expand and liberalize passenger services even further. It thus marks another dimension in our ever-deepening partnership—clearly demonstrating our joint determination to further enhance our bilateral trade, tourism and closer people-to-people contacts.

With this signing, we can expect the entry of new carriers into our aviation markets. This will result in not only more flights and lower costs, but also a freer flow of goods, services and people between our two countries. We will also benefit from the new commercial and job opportunities created as our designated airlines bring in and maintain, in our respective countries, the necessary staff required to conduct business.

Equally important, the Agreement will lead to even closer cooperation between us in the area of transportation safety and security. Like the United States, Thailand attaches great importance to both issues, especially in the aftermath of 9/11. Indeed, we are already working together on a number of projects, including the Personal Identification, Secured Comparison and Evaluation System (PISCES), the Container Security Initiative (CSI), the

Advanced Passenger Information (API) and Advanced Passenger Processing (APP) Systems as well as the Bangkok/Laem Chabang Efficient and Secure Trade (BEST) project within the APEC framework.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Agreement is also timely. We are in the middle of our FTA negotiations. Once concluded, this FTA will lead to increased trade and investment between our countries. This in turn will lead to increased demands for air freight and passenger services as our businesses call for more convenient, more liberalized and safer air transportation between us.

Fully cognizant of these and other demands, the Royal Thai Government has always sought to improve our air transport services. Today's signing is part of our strategy to deal with the expected increase in transport needs. Importantly, our new international airport, Suvarnabhumi Airport, is scheduled to open for commercial traffic next June. Coupled with plans to improve transportation and communications links between Thailand and neighbouring countries, including China and India, Thailand's role as a regional hub will be greatly enhanced. We therefore invite the United States to make full use of Thailand as your regional hub in your dealings with Thailand and beyond.

In sum, Ladies and Gentlemen, the signing of this Agreement is a reaffirmation of our mutual desire to strengthen our economic partnership. It will not only benefit business travelers, tourists and the occasional travelers, but will also contribute, both directly and indirectly, to the expansion of our economic linkages and people-to-people contacts in the years to come.

Thank you.
