

**REMARKS BY H.E. DR. AMNUAY VIRAVAN
AT THE RECEPTION OF THE UNIVERSITY
OF MICHIGAN ALUMNI**

Thursday, June 05, 2008

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

As an economist, I know the value of “first mover advantage.” After listening to all the best speakers before me this evening, I thought for a moment – may be I should start thinking very quickly about the “second mover advantage” for my own sake. Then, I remembered the hit song “save the Best For the Last,” and felt somewhat vindicated, The now be thinking “Spare Me”, I therefore, shall be brief.

In the fall of 1960, an exhausted presidential candidate John F. Kennedy stood on the steps of the University of Michigan Students Union at two in the morning, speaking to the students who had waited for hours for his arrival. His impromptu remarks lasted for only three minutes; but they were to become the seeds of one of President Kennedy’s most enduring legacies the Peace Corp.

Today, in five minutes, in front of a “talked out” crowd, I shall try to plant the seeds of what can become a lasting legacy of UM alumni in Thailand and friends. Whether or not I succeed, only time will tell. After all, there can be only one John F. Kennedy.

Thailand and the United States have long enjoyed a special relationship. It is based on shared values and interests. But as with any relationship, these ties have evolved through the ebbs and flows of time. Realities change, and memories fade. Today, the new generations of both countries know little of each other’s past and heritage. Diminished are the sentiments that make these relations special.

So today, I am proposing a small step towards garnering and nurturing the mutual appreciation of the peoples of the two countries. Such appreciation may someday and in some ways large and small, change the dynamics of the two countries' relations.

This small step is a one million US dollar permanent endowment for the Thai Studies program at the University of Michigan. I propose that this fund - raising drive be completed in three years, and the one million dollar shall thereafter remain in perpetuity. That means that each year the university shall use only the revenue generated by the endowment for the program, leaving the total principle amount in place for generations to come.

To live up to my own words, I am pledging a two hundred and ten thousand US dollar donation to match the donation of the Royal Thai Government during the past years. The sum is to be paid out in three annual installments to the university for the endowment from 2008 to 2010. Mind you, I plan to pledge only 100,000 US dollar to the Endowment Fund this evening but the Michigan spirit deep inside my heart urged me to double my donation for this noble cause. May be this is a disadvantage of being the last mover.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am urging all of you here and beyond, both individuals and corporations, those in the private and public sectors, Thai and American, to give to the future, and take part in making a difference. It is not only for our university, not that it is such a bad thing, mind you, but for the ideal of improving the lot of others, and bringing about a world that thrives on mutual appreciation and respect, as the result of better understanding of one another.

The university already has about US\$ 210,000 dollars in funding of this endowment from the Royal Thai Government. Raising the rest even with my own donation of 210,000 dollars may not be easy, but it is doable.

From today onward, there will be many people joining together to devise the plan and strategy to achieve this goal and fulfill this vision. I urge all of you to please take part in this process, and do all that you can, in all the ways you can. It is a goal attainable, a vision worthy of our effort. It will be a landmark undertaking on the part of Thai UM alumni. And it begins here.

Winston Churchill once asked “what is the use of living if it be not to strive for noble causes and to make this muddled world a better place for those who will live in it after we are gone?”

History has shown us that the world is a better place today because a handful aspired to attain a noble end. So I say- let’s do it together today and win one for a better tomorrow. It will be a legacy in which we can take pride. Many of those unborn today shall one day benefit from our effort, after we all have long been gone. By taking part, we will have transcended the limitations of life and time. By taking part, we will have lived a life that transcends all its frivolities and absurdities, and becomes one that makes sense, a life that truly matters.

Thank you.