

Bangkok Alcohol Policy Conference 11-12 August 2006

"King Thong" Room, Asia Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand

Opening address

By Professor Dr. Suchai Charoenratanakul

Distinguished Guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Good morning every one. Welcome to Thailand particularly those who make a very long journey from other parts of the world.

It's my pleasure to be here to give a talk on the subject that I feel so passionate about; that is, the health and social problems from alcohol consumption and how we can fight and try to control them. "

As we are fully aware that alcohol consumption is a major risk factor in low-mortality in health in developing countries and ranks third in developed countries. It is also the cause of premature mortality around the world, which is currently at 3.2%. The majority of these losses occurring in the developing world. Therefore, alcohol abuse is one of the greatest health-demoting behaviours in the Asia-Pacific region.

Conventionally, countries in the Asia-Pacific region are easily differentiated in terms of alcohol consumption level. Consumption in those countries with well known high-consumption rate, such as Australia, New Zealand, Korea and Japan, are still remained high in the past few decades. In other words those countries have a very mature alcohol markets.

At the same time, a fast growth in alcohol consumption rate is seen in previously dry countries, in parallel with the economic growth. Increases in alcohol consumption in the Asia-Pacific countries, particularly in China, India and Thailand, make the Asia-Pacific region one of the brightest markets for alcohol industry.

The marketing strategy of international' alcohol company into this emerging region, particularly under the umbrella of the free-market system. The aggressive marketing campaign, and an increase in the popularity of western-style and branded beverages, have changed the way alcohol is consumed in this region, particularly among youth and young adults.

As a result, the youth and female habitual drinkers are more common in many parts of the region and raise public concern. Of course alcoholic beverages are not ordinary goods; the increases in its consumption simply implies increasing in alcohol-related violents on the others.

1.8 million lives per year or 5,000 lives per day, are lost from alcohol consumption worldwide. Many of these losses are preventable. Thus, an effective alcohol policy framework with evidence-based strategies and evidence-based programs, as declared by the 58th World Health Assembly, are urgently needed.

However, the effective policy cannot be implemented and copied from other countries around the world. It should be coordinated and synergistic with existing public health infrastructures in each country and in the region as a whole.

In this globalized world, any efforts will be limited by social factors, economic factors and geographical factors. A modern alcohol policy should be participated with a wide-range of relevant actors from public health and other non-commercial interests. In addition, contributions from local and global actors to set up the policy is really helpful.

The need for health voice on alcohol has never been greater than today. Thus we are here to play our important role, hand in hand, in developing and supporting an effective strategy to reduce alcohol related problems. This is for the future of our own destiny.

Finally, ladies and gentleman, I now declare the opening of the Bangkok Alcohol Policy Conference. I look forward to seeing your contributions and superb outcomes of the Conference. I hope you can in share your experiences and knowledge with your colleagues in other part of the world and wish you have a pleasant stay in Bangkok.

Thank you.