

# Press Releases: Remarks to the Embassy Staff

Remarks

Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

Bangkok, Thailand

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**AMBASSADOR DAVIES:** Hello, everybody. (Speaking Thai.) Thank you so much for coming. How cool to see all you kids here. Thank you so much for coming today.

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, family members, friends, Jackie and I are so happy to have you in our home, great to have you here. Thanks for coming to welcome Secretary Tillerson, his delegation, and also our special guests, Congressman Frelinghuysen and Representative Cuellar.

Mr. Chairman, Congressmen, welcome. Great to have you here.

Susan Thornton, my immediate boss, is also here somewhere. There she is. Great to see Susan visiting us here in Bangkok.

We are very pleased that Secretary Tillerson is able to come to Bangkok after a very successful weekend in Manila with ASEAN, and all the more so that he is able to find time out of his way-too-tight schedule to visit with all of us, the employees and the families of our Mission community, both Americans and our treasured Thai colleagues.

It's great, as well, to have somewhere in the house electronically joining us – and I see them up in the window there – American Consulate General Chiang Mai. Thank you for remoting in to us on DVC.

What y'all do every day to advance American interests, security, economic, people-to-people, not just in the Kingdom, but around the hemisphere and around the world, is vital and remarkable. And I am mightily proud to show you all off to the Secretary today.

Mr. Secretary, welcome to Bangkok. Mission Thailand is America's flagship diplomatic mission in Asia. Half of us are here doing regional work. One-fifth of us, twenty percent of us here, work on public health issues, keeping disease in check. We get about a million Americans a year who come to the

beautiful Kingdom of Thailand, and our consular colleagues help those folks out. Our military and law enforcement, USAID, State Department, so many other agencies here, are all part of the team.

I want to give a shout-out to our chief operating officer Pete Haymond, who is also in the house. Where is Pete? He is right there, and Dusadee. Great to have them here, as well.

Look, I could go on. I'm going to stop. But diplomacy is a people business, it's about people. And we've got, here in the Kingdom, not just good people, but great people. So, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, friends, families, allow me to introduce to you the Secretary of State of the United States of America, Rex Tillerson. (Applause.)

**SECRETARY TILLERSON:** Well, thank you so much, Ambassador Davies, and thanks for your leadership here of the Embassy in Thailand, Mission Bangkok, and good morning to all. (Speaking Thai.)

So I also want to recognize, as well, the two colleagues from the U.S. Congress here on a CODEL making some rounds in the region, extremely important, and we appreciate the support you give to the various CODELs that come through the region. It's critical to the Congress being able to carry out their oversight responsibilities, and also inform the decisions they have to make. And I appreciate Chairman Frelinghuysen, and we've had an opportunity to meet on a number of occasions, had some breakfast discussions together. He's important, obviously, on House Appropriations. And a fellow Texan, Congressman Cuellar, as well. And so welcome to both of you, and good luck. I hope you have a great, successful trip around the region.

I've had the pleasure, obviously, to be to Thailand many, many times in my prior life. So this – been coming here over the last 25 years. But obviously, first time here as Secretary of State. And I really am delighted and honored to be here with you.

It's also great, as well, to have Consul Jill Harhigh and the folks from Chiang Mai. And I'm glad they can be with us, as well. Welcome to all of you, and especially the members of the local staff who have served us both here and the U.S. Mission to Thailand for many, many decades. And your role is invaluable, just really invaluable to our success.

I know my visit occurs during a year of national mourning in remembrance of His Majesty King Bhumibol. I think all of you know His Majesty was just a wonderful, wonderful friend of America, and really, I think, set the tone for the relationship between the United States and Thailand. And we mourn his death, as well, and already miss him. I will be going to pay my respects to the king after leaving here today.

The U.S.-Thailand relationship, I think as you know, it is a historic one. We want to continue to grow that relationship, even in its ups and downs, which has been the history of this country. We have been treaty partners for over 184 years, and we've been allies for over 60. So next year the U.S., I think most of you know, will mark 200 years of relations with Thailand. And I think

that's significant because elections are scheduled here in Thailand next year, as well, to return the country to civilian control. We certainly hope those elections proceed as scheduled. And I think it'll be meaningful that we're celebrating 200 years at a time when the country is returning to civilian control.

I know you manage a wide range of issues here. I want to touch on a few of them, just to recognize your efforts. In particular, public health cooperation has really been a cornerstone in this area. I know a fifth of our Mission staff work on health issues here in this Mission, working with a number of partners. You've really become the second country in the world now to eliminate mother-to-child transmission of HIV, and that is an extraordinary achievement.

I also know of your direct collaborations with other Thai medical researchers to develop some of the world's first Japanese encephalitis and hepatitis A vaccines. And all of those are going to be extremely valuable to other parts of the world, as well. Appreciate the strong support for ongoing research to help address and hopefully eradicate other diseases like malaria, the Zika virus, other tropical diseases. So vital work to our interests, but to our global interests, as well.

I know our people-to-people ties here in Thailand, they've always been strong, and they continue to grow stronger with a very, very healthy exchange of Thai students and American students: American students traveling here to study and Thai students traveling to the United States. And, of course, we have more than 75,000 Americans call Thailand home. So you have a lot of friends and colleagues and fellow citizens to provide services to, and also look out for their safety, as well.

Our security alliance here in Thailand continues to be strong. It dates back to an era of conflict in this region. And we hold – today we'll be holding more than 130 joint mil-to-mil exercises. And again, I think that's just a great testament to how close that security alliance is, how it's valued by us and it's valued by the Thai Government as well, obviously.

So I think our bilateral relationships are strong, they're broad. This Mission is, I know all of you know, is the largest outside of a war zone, with almost 50 agencies represented in this Mission conducting a broad array of work, carrying out American interests with partners here and elsewhere.

So I think it's – the role you play here, it's invaluable. We appreciate that you're here with your families. I love to see the families here with you, as well. It's a great opportunity, you know, for growth, for you, for your children, for your families. We also recognize any assignment overseas comes with sacrifice because Thailand is a long way from Continental United States. And so we know that means missing some family events back home from time to time, missing opportunities to be with family on special occasions.

That's part of the sacrifice we all make when we agree to work overseas. Hopefully, the rewards that you receive out of the experiences you have here far outweigh those sacrifices. And I think what you're doing, really, is

making memories. You're making memories. Partially, you're making memories with your family that you will hold and cherish for years to come. And so I hope that's the way you view your time here, as well.

The most important role that all of you play that are serving here from the United States, though, is you are the face of America. This is what the people of Thailand see when they think about America, they look at you, and this is what they see. And so you need – you do represent – and you know every day you have to represent the very best of the United States of America, because that's what people are looking to as you represent our country so extraordinarily well.

So I thank each and every one of you for your commitment. Your patriotism is clear to all of us. And your commitment to the mission here in Thailand is quite evident, as well, with the string of successes, some of – just a few of which I touched on.

So thank all of you. It's a delight to be here and have the opportunity to spend a few minutes addressing you. And everybody knows how much I love children, and so we have – we got plenty of kids represented here. The Boy Scouts are near and dear to my heart, but so are Girl Scouts and any youth serving organization that brings kids together and gives them the opportunity to achieve things as individuals, achieve things together, working as teams together, building that self-confidence. And these are terrific organizations that do that. So I thank the parents and the leaders who devote their time and take the time to volunteer to do that. I know there is all this extra pay involved for being a Boy Scout leader. (Laughter.) I know how that works.

But I do sincerely want to thank the adults who take this time to provide the leadership so that our young people can have these kinds of experiences while – even when they're away from the United States. So thank you for what you do, and – as well as I know many of you undertake volunteer activities, and we appreciate your commitment, as well.

So it's great to be with you. It's a short stop for me but we're going to try to use every bit of it while we're here in Thailand and make some important contacts with the leadership here. And I will be back. I will be back for a longer visit. I love Thailand, have great memories over the years of coming here, and a real affection for the Thai people. And thank all of you again. (Applause.)

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