Good morning and a warm welcome to Bangkok to you all.

It gives me great pleasure to join you here today for this very important symposium on the protection of cultural heritage in South-East Asia.

South-East Asia is a point of origin for some of the world’s most priceless treasures, ranging from prehistoric artefacts to contemporary objects of art. Unfortunately, it is also one of the crossroads for trades in the art and antique objects.

For Thailand, the problem of cultural trafficking is one of the Ministry of Culture’s serious concerns. Thailand’s importance experience in this area was the case of the Narai stone lintel which was returned from the Art Institute of Chicago in 1988. This was achieved through a long process of negotiation and mediation.

Since then, the Ministry of Culture has worked closely with many agencies, especially the Department of Customs, to strengthen the protection of cultural objects from illicit exportation. However, the global problem of theft and trafficking of art and antique objects is impacting negatively on the situations of Thailand. We are, therefore, making more efforts in the protection by cooperating with all agencies within the country. And we look forward to closer cooperation with countries in Southeast Asia in this concern.

I would like to congratulate UNESCO for organizing this symposium for the benefit of all Southeast Asian countries. I believe that by working together more closely, and by cooperating with international institutions such as UNESCO, INTERPOL and UNIDROIT, we will be able to make further progress in fighting against this serious problem.

May I wish you successful deliberations in the next 3 days. Once again, welcome, and have a pleasant stay in Bangkok. Sawasdee krap.