



Celebrating 60 years of the Fulbright Program in Thailand!

Alas, Fulbright Thailand's 60th anniversary has passed. It was a grand event, presided by none other than HRH Princess Sirindhorn herself, who gave a lovely and touching speech upon receiving the "Fulbright Caring Leader Across Cultures" award. It was also a time of pride and joy whereby both the Foreign Minister of Thailand and the U.S. Ambassador, as well as (we are told) dignitaries from 30 other embassies joined to celebrate the auspicious occasion lighted by the simple idea that people who understand each other are less likely to go to war with each other. That is a tribute to Senator J. William Fulbright of Arkansas, who was the longest serving chairman in the history of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and a mentor to Bill Clinton.

Since the day the Fulbright Program was established in 1946 under legislation introduced by then Senator Fulbright, an estimated 279,500 "Fulbrighters" have participated in the program.

The event was held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and after opening speeches, HRH Princess Sirindhorn started the day of celebrations by sharing a touching story about her teacher and how she initially came to learn of the United States as well as talking about some of the characteristics that caring leaders should possess i.e. kindness, understanding, willingness to accept mistakes and not blaming subordinates, tolerance, supportiveness, compromise. The Princess spoke of how one could be very caring within his/her own family by understanding the diversity there. It was a simple speech, and yet very insightful and most enjoyable.

U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary for Academic Affairs, Ms. Alina Romanowski, who flew all the way to be with us presented the Fulbright Caring Leader Across Cultures Award to our Princess.

After the award presentation, the Princess was gracious in viewing the exhibitions, engaging in discussions with alumni, and also taking photos with key personnel, including the Thai Fulbright Association Board (above).

The afternoon comprised of three cross-cultural leaders sharing their experiences and advice on the topic “Caring Cultures, Caring Communities”. The speakers included Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, Secretary-General of the ASEAN Secretariat, Mr. Stuart Dean, President of GE ASEAN, and Asst. Prof. Dr. Sukanda Lewis, Chulalongkorn University and Alumna 2009.

The day wrapped up with a reception by the U.S. Ambassador at the Dusit Thani hotel to celebrate the new grantees, as well as present the Fulbright Hall of Fame awards.

The next morning saw a smaller group of around 70 participants representing various sectors brainstorming on topics on collaboration and partnership.

All-in-all, it was a wonderful time we shared with caring leaders in our society and community, catching up with the many fellow Fulbright acquaintances and those of the Fulbright family, and enjoying the well planned festivities throughout the two days of full-fledged celebrations. May Fulbright Thailand last for another 60 years and more!

By Chavapas Ongmahutmongkol (Fulbrighter 2002) and Phornvit Phacharintanakul (Fulbrighter 1975)