

Keynote Speech, 12th NEAC

Progress and Prospect on Environmental Conservation in China

Xu Qinghua

Director General, Department of International Cooperation,

State Environmental Protection Administration, P.R. China

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Mr. Chair-person, ladies and gentlemen:

Good morning.

I am very pleased to be here at the 12th Northeast Asian Conference on Environmental Cooperation. Thank you for inviting me and my colleagues to this important conference. First of all, please allow me, on behalf of the State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA) of the People's Republic of China, to extend our sincere congratulation to the opening of the Twelfth Northeast Asia Conference On Environmental Cooperation (NEAC) here in Toyama of Japan. I also would like to extend my sincere appreciation to the Government of Japan for hosting and organizing this conference. I wish to get to know more friends here so that we could coordinate for the betterment of environmental cooperation in Northeast Asia.

Northeast Asia is abundant with natural resources and has a great human resource potential. Together with the political will of all countries concerned, and the fact that it lies close to some of the world's fastest growing and biggest

economies, this region is likely to become one of the largest international development centers. As a result, there is a long-term potential to attract investments for infrastructure, natural resource development, industry, mining, oil exploration, and urban development. However, the industrial and economic development will also bring new dangers, and unless mitigation strategies are implemented, growth in this region will threaten the regional environmental resources.

The 11th NEAC, as hosted by China, was held in Hainan, China, in December last year. It was a fruitful meeting where representatives from Japan, Korea, Russian Federation, Mongolia and China had in-depth discussions on regional environmental issues. I wish that the meeting this year would further enhance the open discussions among the member countries and facilitate the environmental cooperation in the region.

Here, I would like to take this opportunity to give a brief overview of environmental protection and sustainable development in China in general and also the situation in the past year.

In the new century, China will continuously maintain a high economic growth rate: national economic output is expected to double in the next 10 years. Along the process of economic restructuring and economic development, China will face challenges from both domestic and global environmental concerns. With a huge population, below-average per capita share of natural resources, insufficient infrastructure and fast-paced urbanization, China's social and economic development in the 21st century, which includes such grand

projects like the great western development, water diversion from south to north, Beijing's 2008 Olympics, and China's entry the WTO, will be greatly hindered by the already-deteriorating ecological environment. In order to maintain a fast and healthy economic development and gradually improve the environmental quality, China has established compatible environmental protection goals in the next few years:

- At an economic growth rate of 7%, the total discharge volume of major pollutants will be reduced by 10% from 2000 to 2005;
- A 20% reduction of SO₂ emission within the acid rain control zone and SO₂ control zone from 2000 to 2005;
- A 60% water reuse rate in the industrial sector; an average domestic sewage treatment rate of 45% and 60% in cities with a population of greater than 500,000. This is equivalent to an increase of daily domestic sewage treatment capacity of 26 million tons.
- The comprehensive solid waste utilization rate will reach 50% and the urban waste disposal rate will reach 65%.
- Approximately 13% of national land will be protected by nature reserves.
- The program of forest/grassland reclamation from cultivated land will be continued;
- Environmental quality at key river basins, regions, coastal areas and cities will be improved.
- Water quality of the "Three Gorges" reservoir and water diversion project from south to north will meet their planned goals.

These goals can only be achieved through sustainable

development and its implementation in various sectors:

- Industry: along the process of industrial restructuring, clean production will be further promoted, together with industries of high efficiency and environmental friendly products. Eco-park demonstration projects will be established and new sustainable economic development models will be experimented.
- Agriculture: traditional farming practice will be improved toward ecological, organic and water-conservation farming, green and organic food products will be developed.
- Urban development: urban planning will focus on the creation of a clean and comfortable environment for citizens. More environmental infrastructures like wastewater and solid waste treatment plants will be constructed. Emission from mobile sources will be further controlled.
- Rural development: the priority will focus on raising the level of environmental awareness of farmers. More environmental-friendly towns and villages will be constructed.
- Ecological protection: more ecological special function zones and priority natural resources areas will be established and protected. Ecological demonstration projects will be established.
- Great western development program: Ecological management and protection will be enforced along the development

process. Forest/grassland reclamation will be further implemented.

In 2002, China has made remarkable achievements in pollution prevention and control. Discharge of major pollutant in 2002, namely sulfur dioxide, smoke, industrial dust, COD and industrial solid waste has reduced at 10.3%, 26.1%, 35.3%, 10.3% and 58.9% respectively, as in comparison with those of the year 1998. Pollution in main streams of Huaihe River has been markedly reduced and degradation of water quality in Taihu Lake and Chaohu Lake has been primarily under control. Eutrophication in Dianchi Lake has been primarily curbed. Remarkable achievements have also been made regarding pollution prevention and control in the "Dual Control Area". In 2002, cities graded as level two for sulfur dioxide concentration have reached 56.9% of the total in sulfur dioxide control area, a remarkable increase from the 32.8% in 1998. Precipitation acidity in acid rain control area has been in decrease. The project for pollution prevention and control in Bohai Sea has been initiated.

On the other hand, conservation of ecology and environment in China has been further strengthened. Protection and construction of ecology and environment have been identified as key component in developing the western areas. The project on protection of natural forest resources has been initiated and other initiatives include restoring farmland to lakes and forests, immigrations for ecological considerations, etc. Investigations on ecology and environment in western and middle part of China have been completed. By the end of 2002, 5,027,500 hectares of forest have been cultivated as a result of the project on protection of natural forest resources, and

5,831,000 hectares of forests have been restored from farmlands. New achievements have been made in construction and management of natural reserves and bio-diversity protection. By the end of 2002, 1757 natural reserves have been established, a total area of 132,950,000 hectares that accounts for 13.2% of the territory. Environmental protection in rural areas are attached great importance. Stubble burning is banned and comprehensive resource utilization is promoted.

As a country of profound environmental indications and liabilities, China has actively initiated the strategy for sustainable development. The legal system for sustainable development has been primarily shaped, with over 20 laws and 100 regulations issued regarding environment and resource protection. Further to the National Report on Sustainable Development published right before the World Summit on Sustainable Development last year, the Action Plan for Sustainable Development in the Beginning of 21st Century was published in July, 2003. As a result that the strategy for sustainable development is implemented, active progress has been made in the strategic reform of industrial structure, rapid population growth has been controlled, resource consumption and pollutant discharge per capita has been in decrease, which have all contributed to the continuous, rapid and healthy development of national economy. Despite of the great achievements China has made in society and economy, China is still in the extensive mode for economic growth, with pressures from population growth, shortage of resources and environmental degradation. Therefore, it still remains the long-term priority for China to eradicate poverty, achieve economic growth, improve the living standard and ease the burden from environmental pollution.

Experiences from the years have proved to us that cooperation

at international level, and regional level in particular, is essential in further facilitating sustainable development as supported by social progress, economic growth and environmental protection. NEAC has, since its establishment, been serving as a major mechanism for environmental cooperation within the region. Member countries have been in cooperation through the years and NEAC has further provided an effective and helpful communication channel, which enables research on regional environmental status and prioritizing key areas for regional cooperation. Environmental protection and sustainable development in the region have been actively enhanced as a result of discussions and policy cooperation on issues of regional population, human resource development, natural resources, resource development, environmental risks and international cooperation on environmental protection. China will participate, in a more active manner, in environmental cooperation within the region. We sincerely wish that our cooperation under NEAC would help to improve the environmental status within the region, bring changes to the present production mode and pave the way for sustainable development among all members.

At last, I would like to wish this meeting successful and fruitful.

Thank you!