

Key-note Speech

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Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen!

It is a great honor and pleasure for me to join you today to discuss environmental policies and initiatives for sustainability in our region. I extend my appreciation to the Ministry of the Environment of Japan, the Northwest Pacific Region Environmental Cooperation Center, and the Overseas Environmental Cooperation Center for their hard work in organizing this conference. I also thank the city of Toyoma for her gracious welcome and generosity.

The importance of regional cooperation in addressing global environmental problems has been highly stressed since the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development(UNCED) held in Rio De Janeiro. This recognition did not go unnoticed in Northeast Asia; it actually led to the establishment of NEAC for stronger regional environmental cooperation. Since first meeting in 1992, NEAC has convened 11 times so far and enabled our countries to exchange views and share experiences on practically all environmental issues. Through NEAC, we have built a strong human resources network and promoted the spirit of solidarity for belonging to the same environmental community.

This year, we discuss dust and sandstorm, preservation of marine environment, recycling society, and environmental cooperation of local authorities. By exchanging information and gaining new perspectives, we can expect to enhance mutual understanding and improve relevant policies. Particularly, I believe that this morning's Public Symposium on Deterioration of Land and DSS has greatly helped to raise public awareness and support for the prevention of DSS, which has grown into one of the most serious environmental challenges in Northeast Asia.

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to briefly introduce Korea's achievements and future plans for environmental policies.

Let me start by pointing out that in Korea, 46% of our entire population lives in the capital region, which takes up only 11.7% of the total land mass. Due to this concentration, the main focus of the Ministry of Environment is environmental improvement of the capital region. Starting in 2002, our Ministry has been implementing comprehensive measures to bring up air quality in the capital region to the level of environmentally advanced OECD countries by 2012.

These measures consist of total pollution load management, emissions trading, and mandatory manufacture and purchase of low-emission vehicles. They are now incorporated into a special air pollution control law and await passage by the National Assembly.

In terms of water quality management, Korea enacted special laws for the protection of the four major domestic rivers in 1999 and 2002. These laws provide for the establishment of riparian buffer zones, total pollution load management, application of the User Pays Principle, and non-point source management. However, enacting these laws was by no means easy. Although most stakeholders agreed that preventive and demand-side approach contained in the proposed measures would do much to safeguard the water resources, they remained unwilling to compromise their respective interests.

As a result, 420 meetings took place over five years among affected residents, experts, local authorities, environmental organizations, and the government. These meetings helped mediate stakeholder conflict and created the basis for developing practical and enforceable water protection measures. Through this experience, we realized that public participation and mutual concession is essential to successful policy-making.

Next, I would like to touch upon Korea's waste management. Our policies in this area were developed to reduce waste generation and facilitate recycling. One example would be the Volume-based Waste Fee System that requires each household to pay for the treatment cost of its own waste. The system, which went into force in 1995, has resulted in substantial reduction of domestic waste and also prompted people to become more conscious of their consumption activities.

Additionally, in order to promote recycling, Korea has been enforcing the Extended Producers Responsibility System since January 2003 on 15 products, including metal cans and electrical appliances. Details on EPR will be discussed at Session 2 tomorrow.

For sustainable land management, Korea will introduce the Strategic Environmental Assessment System that supplements Environmental Impact Assessment and Prior Environmental Review System. We have been performing environmental impact assessment on development projects above a certain scale; however, in some cases, assessment outcomes could not be adequately reflected in project development due to time difference. In light of this shortcoming, our Ministry makes efforts to establish a precautionary decision making procedure in which potential environmental impact is assessed at the drafting stage of major national policies and development plans.

Korea will also expand the Eco-labeling System to induce sustainable production and consumption. To encourage environmentally friendly business and consumption, we plan to enact the Green Consumption Promotion Act, stipulating the roles and responsibilities of each economic entity, from consumers to governments to enterprises.

Korea also strives to partake actively in the global and regional efforts to realize sustainable development. In addition to ratifying the Kyoto Protocol for global warming mitigation, we established intergovernmental committees to effectively implement the outcomes of the WSSD. We also collaborate with ESCAP, ADB, UNCCD, UNEP and our neighboring countries to prevent DSS in Northeast Asia. I believe that such action-oriented partnerships will help achieve sustainability in Northeast Asia, one of the most dynamic regions in the world.

Finally, I want to extend Korea's cordial invitation to the 8th Special Session of the UNEP Governing Council and Global Ministerial Environment Forum, which will be held in March 2004 in Jeju Island. This is the first time that the Governing Council is convening in Asia and we would like to ensure its success. This can be done only through your active participation and support.

Unlike other regions, Asia has so far been unable to pinpoint to a common environmental issue for discussion in the international context due to our different geographical, economic and social conditions. However, I believe that as a region with one of the most significant environmental and demographic problems, Asia owes it to our future generations and to the international community as a whole to bring our issues forward.

In this regard, next year's meeting can serve as a good starting point. I would like to let you know that Korea is currently talking with the UNEP secretariat to include desertification and DSS in Northeast Asia in the State of the Environment (SOE) report.

I hope that countries can individually and collectively make efforts to present our regional environmental agenda to the world for more effective resolution.

Thank you.