

Keynote Speech

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Distinguished delegates! Ladies and gentlemen!

It is a great honor and pleasure to welcome you to the 13th Northeast Asian Conference on Environmental Cooperation.

To each and every one of you, I extend my sincere appreciation for joining this meeting. I also thank the City of Seoul for hosting this conference together with the Ministry of Environment.

As you know, a quarter of the world's population lives in the Northeast Asian region which accounts for 13% of world trade. No doubt in the past but also in the present and future, our Northeast Asian region is the most dynamically growing areas in the world. Such economic growth leads to the destruction of ecosystems as well as pollution in our waters and air and excessive waste generation. Overcoming the challenge of appropriately addressing these environmental issues is not simple matter.

Countries in Northeast Asia share a common environmental sphere. Problems in one nation often have impacts on a regional scale and even become recognized as global environmental issues. In this way I believe that regional cooperation is the first step in resolving today's environmental problems.

It has already been 13 years since the Northeast Asian Conference on Environmental Cooperation was created to address such important matters of our region. As we look back, NEAC stands out as a policy forum where multiple stakeholders from central government, local government, citizen groups and research institutes have been able to hold candid discussions and to gather best practices and experiences for developing joint response measures.

Yesterday, the Open Symposium on "Air Quality Management Policy in Metropolitan Areas" was successfully held in the National Assembly. Today and tomorrow, we will discuss the key topics for this year's NEAC: species restoration, ecological restoration in local governments, and

sustainable management of industrial complexes. It is my hope and expectation that our deliberations will lead to better understanding of our current environmental issues and characteristics as well as to a variety of suggestions on how best to resolve our problems

Ladies and gentlemen!

It has recently occurred to me yet again that Korea's winters have gotten warmer. Such skin-felt changes in the weather are clear tell-tale signs of the gravity of global environmental issues such as climate change, air pollution and biodiversity loss. Therefore I place great importance on NEAC because I believe our efforts on-ground at the regional level have immense impacts on alleviating these global pressures.

This past week I was at the 10th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Buenos Aires. Many nations put their heads together in Argentina on climate change issues. With the Kyoto Protocol coming into effect next February thanks to Russia's ratification, this important first step in a globally coordinated response to climate change will finally be launched.

Ladies and gentlemen!

Next March, Seoul will host the Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development. This UN ESCAP conference will have as its theme environmentally sustainable economic growth. I cordially request all of your deep interest and support.

In closing, I would like to encourage everyone to make the most of the opportunity before us and work to produce feasible action items from the lively discussions. Please enjoy your stay in Seoul to the fullest

Thank you for your attention.