

Remarks by H.E. Ban Ki-moon,
Minister of Foreign Affairs & Trade
at the Opening Ceremony of the first APEC SOM 2005

(March 4, 2005, Hotel Shilla)

APEC SOM Leaders,
Representatives of the APEC members and the Secretariat,
Ladies and Gentlemen Good morning !

On behalf of the Korean government, it is my great pleasure to extend a warm welcome to all participants here to attend this year's first APEC SOM (Senior Officials Meeting) in Korea.

Distinguished Guests, and SOM leaders,

We are gathered here today to achieve the mission of moving forward in efforts to build an open and free trade and investment environment in the Asia-Pacific region. This task is of such importance due to the weight that APEC members take in the world economy. As has been repeatedly emphasized, APEC members altogether account for as much as half of the world's trade and 60% of global GDP.

From its very beginnings in 1989, Korea has been a part of APEC as one of the key founding members. We also played host to the 3rd APEC Ministerial Meeting in 1991, at which the Seoul Declaration was adopted.

This year, we need to look back to see how far the APEC economies have traveled towards achieving the Bogor Goals. The task of determining what lies ahead also rests on our shoulders. In addition, for global trade, members of APEC have been called upon to generate critical momentum for the WTO process, as the Hong Kong Ministerial Meeting is to be held at the end of this year.

In this regard, we have the momentous task of not only achieving the advancement of APEC, but also working for the smooth resolution of global issues.

The theme of APEC 2005 is "Towards One Community: Meet the Challenge, Make the Change". This represents APEC members' aspiration to take meaningful and substantial steps towards building an Asia-Pacific community.

I am very pleased to note that three sub-themes have emerged as important items on the agenda, which will serve to translate the main theme into action programs. In this regard, I wish to touch on the broad direction and meaning of future discussions on these sub-themes.

The first sub-theme expresses the APEC members' willingness to 'renew their commitment to the Bogor Goals'. This refers to the issue of promoting freer trade in the Asia-Pacific and indeed the world as well. The Mid-term review known as a "Stocktaking exercise" at APEC 2005 will take APEC's work in the liberalization and facilitation of trade and investment further forward.

The second sub-theme represents the APEC members' enthusiasm to "ensure a transparent and secure business environment" in the region.

On fighting corruption and promoting transparency, it is my understanding that APEC will go further, beyond last year's Santiago Commitment into specifics for implementation through its Task Force meetings and symposium in September. On human security, APEC is intensifying its work on anti-terrorism, energy security and health issues, while further broadening the scope to include cooperation in taking countermeasures to prepare against natural disasters.

The third sub-theme highlights our strong commitment to "build bridges over differences" in the region. This illustrates the continuation of APEC cooperation, with an emphasis on sharing the benefits of a knowledge-based economy as well as promoting cultural understanding.

Altogether, the main theme and sub-themes offer us a clear sense of our goals and direction in the pursuit of tangible success at this year's APEC. Keeping these objectives in mind, Korea is committed to doing its utmost to ensure that APEC bears real fruit this year.

Korea will continue to maintain strong commitment to APEC and to pro-actively participate in its activities. This year, Korea is determined to make steps forward to APEC's goal and vision with close cooperation with all members.

Distinguished Delegates!

At this juncture, Korea and, in fact, the entire region are facing the challenge of addressing the North Korean nuclear issue, one of the most serious threats to peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula and beyond. In this regard, Korea and the countries concerned are striving to find a peaceful solution to the North Korean nuclear issue through the Six-Party Talks. It is our sincere hope that the North Korean nuclear issue will be resolved as quickly as possible. This will be a vital element in fostering a stable and peaceful environment conducive to building an economic community in the APEC region.

We are very grateful for the APEC members having collectively expressed their active support for us on all possible occasions. It is our hope that the APEC members will continue to render their valuable support.

Distinguished Delegates!

This first SOM of APEC 2005 has just begun to lead us to a meaningful journey this year. I am confident that the wisdom and insight of SOM leaders will contribute to realizing tangible outcomes out of APEC 2005 process. In this regard, I would like to reaffirm again that the Korean government stands firmly behind you, ready to offer support not only for this SOM, but also all APEC meetings throughout the year. Thank you very much.