

Congratulatory Remarks at the University Presidents' Global Forum in Commemoration of the Centennial of Korea University

The Honorable President Euh Yoon-Dae of Korea University, university presidents from home and abroad, and distinguished guests,

I wholeheartedly congratulate you on the opening of the University Presidents' Global Forum and am very pleased to be with all of you who represent the pinnacle of world intellectual endeavors. I warmly welcome the presidents from abroad and congratulate Korea University on its centennial tomorrow.

Distinguished university presidents,

I cite democracy as one of the most profound reforms in the history of humanity. It is the most successful system in enhancing human dignity and realizing creativity. Universities have been the cradle for the development of democracy. The liberal spirit that permeates universities has played a decisive role in developing and propagating such universal values as human rights, justice, equality and peace.

Universities are not confined within an ivory tower. During every time of change, they have served as a moral force for historic progress. This is the basis for the liberty and human rights we enjoy today.

Distinguished guests,

Universities in Korea are no exception. Standing up to Japan's colonial occupation and unjust dictatorial regimes, they preserved the national spirit and creed of democracy. The Student Revolution of April 19, 1960 and the democratization movement known as the June Struggle of 1987 are part of the proud chronicle of Korean democracy.

Universities played a significant role in achieving the "Miracle on the Han River," and catapulting the nation into the ranks of the top ten economies in the world. Every time I have been asked what was the driving force for the development of Korea, I have not hesitated to say it was the Koreans' great zeal for education.

Even now, the college and university admission rate in Korea of 81 percent is the highest in the world. Furthermore, our universities have been pressing ahead rapidly with innovation. Therefore, we pin high expectations for a bright future on the universities.

Distinguished presidents,

Greeting the start of the 21st century, we entertained the hope that the world order would be shifted toward peace and coexistence. However, even now, confrontation and conflict go on endlessly in every corner of the world. The world order is based on power and national interests rather than justice.

Here in the Northeast Asian region, too, the painful wounds left over from the imperial age have not been healed yet and still constitute a factor for international conflict. Some people are even voicing concern that a tendency toward hegemony may be rearing its head again.

Under these circumstances, the expectations placed on universities are great, indeed, as they are communities of intellectuals. At the very least, universities are expected to be a cradle nurturing the universal values of humanity rather than pursuing national interests blindly.

The pride of intellectuals in their firm belief in democracy, penetrating insight into history and determination to promote world peace can never be exchanged for anything. As long as universities remain the bulwark of the conscience of humanity and do not waver, we can certainly all have hope for the future.

Distinguished university presidents,

In order to fulfill the mandate of the institutions of higher learning, universities and university personnel should further strengthen exchanges and cooperation. Such collaboration is all the more necessary now when society is being driven by knowledge.

It is truly significant that as many as 250 universities are participating in this forum. When intellectuals continue to develop their collective wisdom, they will greatly contribute not only to the development of the institutions of higher learning but also to the resolution of the world's many problems. I trust that this forum will reap great results through good spirited discussions.

Once again, I congratulate you on this auspicious occasion and hope that every one of you will have a rewarding time.

Thank you.