

COOPERATION BETWEEN ASEAN AND KOREA FOR THE NEW CENTURY

The following speech was made by Lee, Joung-binn, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, on July 28, 2000 at the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference 10+1 Session held in Bangkok, Thailand.

The Korean peninsula is a very different place from what it was when this 10+1 session sat last year. The reason, as you all know, is the successes of the first Summit meeting between South and North Korea, held in mid-June. Travelling to Pyongyang for the Summit, President Kim's approach was that the discussion should be comprehensive and open to all topics, with the two leaders being able to bring up whatever issues they wished to.

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Indeed, the discussions were wide-ranging and lengthy. And at the end, the two leaders were able to sign a Joint Declaration, a landmark five-point agreement that will serve to nurture inter-Korean relations away from the mutual distrust and enmity of the past toward genuine reconciliation and peaceful coexistence.

Unlike past agreements between South and North Korea, the Joint Declaration is being followed up with action. In fact, ministerial talks are to begin in Seoul tomorrow between the two sides to work out steps to implement the Joint Declaration. Some steps have already been taken. Immediately after the summit, the two sides stopped slandering each other through loudspeakers along the demilitarized zone. South-North Red Cross talks were held in late June to finalize the plan for an exchange of visits between Seoul and Pyongyang on the occasion of August 15 National Liberation Day this year by members of families that remain separated across the two sides since the end of the Korean War. The two sides also agreed to set up a meeting center that the separated families will be able to use for regular encounters. We will be taking steps to resolve other humanitarian issues. We are also in the process of drafting legal instruments that will expediate the expansion of inter-Korean economic cooperation, such as agreements on investment guarantees and double taxation prevention.

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As I ponder the dramatic turn of events on the Korean peninsula, I am awed at the difference a year can make. This time last year, the whole world was watching the Korean peninsula with much concern and a guarded attitude against North Korea. Today, we have welcomed North Korea to our regional security dialogue, and South and North Korea have begun to reconcile.

The change, however, did not come out of the blue. Indeed, the South-North Summit and its successful outcome, as well as North Korea's improving ties with other countries and participation in the international community, are the result of patient and consistent efforts to engage the North during the past two-and-a-half years, led by South Korea and wholly supported by the international community.

There were times when the wisdom of engagement was questioned. But we stayed the course, for we believe engagement to promote reconciliation and cooperation with the North is entirely in keeping with the historical trend toward greater interdependence among nations. And we will continue to stay the course, because our belief has been strengthened, and because we trust that we have the abiding support of ASEAN and important members of the international community.

A peaceful and prosperous Korean peninsula is certainly in the interest of our neighbors in East Asia. Thus, while nurturing the Korea-ASEAN partnership toward greater maturity and mutual prosperity for the new century, we will count on your cooperation and encouragement in our efforts to build upon the successes of the June Summit for inter-Korean reconciliation and peaceful coexistence.

Beyond the geographical proximity and the growing sense of a common East Asian identity, Korea and ASEAN share a common destiny, as the recent financial crisis clearly showed. It will be even more so in the new century of accelerated globalization.

Korea's ties with ASEAN, which began in 1989, have greatly expanded with exchanges and cooperation in diverse fields. ASEAN is a key partner for Korea in discussions on regional and international political matters. It has also become one of our closest economic partners. Without a doubt, the future prosperity of Korea hinges on a secure and prosperous ASEAN.

I believe that last year's summit meeting between President Kim Dae-jung and the leaders of ASEAN, along with the ASEAN plus Korea, China and Japan Summit held in Manila, shed much new light on Korea's valued relations with ASEAN.

The past two years have been a difficult period for both ASEAN and Korea. However, with the resilience for which they are well known, both Korea and ASEAN are quickly regaining their economic strength and growth momentum. In fact, the recent economic hardship has consolidated, not weakened, the region's readiness to meet the challenges of the new millennium. The crisis has prompted them to confront their shortcoming and solidify the foundation for future prosperity.

Korea has made a remarkable recovery, with bold reforms and liberalization in key sectors. ASEAN has achieved its goal of having all Southeast Asian countries join the ASEAN family. This is testimony to the dedication of ASEAN governments and peoples to dialogue and cooperation, to working together in ever-closer and ever-widening partnerships for the purpose of benefiting all. As such, it sets a model for all to follow.

Korea supports all of ASEAN's efforts to bring about greater prosperity and stability in Southeast Asia. We support ASEAN's "Vision 2020", and we are prepared to fully cooperate in the implementation of the Hanoi Plan of Action. In the long term, we see Korea and ASEAN joining hands to build a prosperous and vibrant East Asian community. I sincerely hope that the 21st century will be an era of shared successes for Korea and ASEAN. **VIP**

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