

Remarks by President Roh Moo-hyun  
at the Opening of the Fifth Ministerial Conference  
on Environment and Development  
in Asia and the Pacific, 2005

The honorable UNESCAP Executive Secretary Kim Hak-su, UNEP Executive Director Klaus Toepfer, Asia Development Bank President Haruhiko Kuroda, delegates from member countries and distinguished guests from home and abroad,

I congratulate you on this auspicious opening of the Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific. I wholeheartedly welcome all of the participants from international organizations and as many as 50 countries.

Delegations participating in this conference include those from countries that suffered a major disaster wrought by the tsunami last year. I offer profound condolences to you, and I pledge once more that the Korean Government will continue to join forces in the international relief activities.

Over the past 20 years since its inception in 1985, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific has played a central role in promoting environmental cooperation. Now this conference has emerged as the largest meeting presenting visions for sustainable development in the Asia-Pacific region.

I am very pleased that this significant meeting is being held in Seoul, and would like to express my sincere gratitude to the ESCAP staff.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen from home and abroad,

Today you have gathered here to deliberate on the topic of “Achieving Environmentally Sustainable Economic Growth.” The theme is very proper and timely considering the present situation and future of the Asia-Pacific region.

The region has been recording economic growth of from 4 to 6 percent every year, leading the world economy. In the future, when the potential of the region based on its time-honored history and culture as well as abundant human resources is fully released, Asia and the Pacific will certainly be able to make dramatic progress.

The region may be in the world limelight, but at the same time it has many tasks that have to be solved in a cooperative effort.

The first and foremost task is to deal with poverty; that is the first prerequisite for a human being to live a decent life. I am aware of some heartrending statistics that revealed as many as 22 percent of the regional population is subsisting on US\$1 or less daily. To resolve this problem, it is urgent to increase income through sustainable economic growth. The Korean people who have overcome poverty through economic growth over the past 40 years know this urgency from firsthand experience.

But at the same time, the country realizes that economic growth that does not consider the environment could result in enormous costs for restoration, presenting a big obstacle to national progress. We also realize that environmental damages can be truly global as is seen in climate changes.

This experience is not limited to the Korean people. For all peoples, the environment and development are not a matter of choice.

Through establishment of the UN Millennium Development Goals and the 2002 Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development, the international community has outlined the tasks of eliminating poverty and achieving environmentally sustainable growth. Now is the time for us to come up with concrete measures and implement them.

I expect that this conference will be able to prepare detailed implementation measures conducive to the harmonious coexistence of a healthy environment and economy.

Participating delegates,

Korea has established a national objective of simultaneously accomplishing both sustainable development and a pleasant environment. This new paradigm for achieving environmentally sound economic growth is being applied to all sectors of society.

The Korean Government established the National Action Plan for the Implementation of Agenda 21 as early as 1996. The Presidential Commission on Sustainable Development has been playing a pivotal role in coordinating and helping resolve a diversity of social conflicts, including environmental issues.

The national environment preservation policy, which is preventive in nature, is being reinforced. From the planning stage of large-scale development projects, full considerations are being given to the environment with all interested parties participating so that the most suitable plan can be formulated. In addition, a database on environmental impact studies as well as an environmental map of the entire land is being constructed. By making those data available to the general public, potential clashes between developers and preservationists can be prevented early on.

Other policies are directed at building a society where resources are recycled; industries are encouraged to cut waste to the minimum from the product designing stage, and various measures are being taken to make recycling easy for citizens. The Korean Government emphasizes nurturing new environment technologies and industries, and this effort to preserve the environment constitutes a viable growth engine of the national economy.

The private sector in Korea has long realized that environment-friendly management is the core of business management; now, Korean citizens are adopting green consumption. From July, all governmental organizations will be required to purchase environment-friendly products.

This strategy aims at dispersing administrative offices now concentrated in the Seoul region to the provinces. In this way each province will pursue development that is appropriate to its own situation. Furthermore, in an endeavor to reduce the burden on the environment and attain sustainable development, a balanced land development strategy is being carried out.

In this way, Korea is overcoming the adverse effects of hasty growth in years gone by and is, instead, pursuing sustainable development. I hope the good results we will be getting from this endeavor will serve as a useful example for other member nations. I ask your cooperation and support in this regard.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

I firmly believe that our quest for peace and common prosperity through regional cooperation should settle as a mainstream international endeavor in the 21st century.

The APEC Economic Leaders ' Meeting, which is slated for Busan in November, will convene on the theme of "Towards One Community: Meet the Challenge, Make the Change" and promises to strengthen economic cooperation in the Asia-Pacific. Likewise, I trust that this conference will serve as a catalyst in bolstering cooperation and partnerships among the countries in the region in the field of environment.

The Republic of Korea will continue to give full support for the success of this conference as well as our common effort to achieve sustainable development in the region.

Once again, I congratulate each one of you for coming to attend this conference and I hope you will have a joyous and rewarding time while staying in Korea.

Thank you.