

Opening speech for the Northeast Asia Economic Conference/Northeast Asia Economic Forum in Niigata, 2004

Governor Hirayama, Mayor Shinoda, Distinguished Participants, guests, ladies and gentlemen.

On behalf of the Northeast Asia Economic Forum, I have the great honor of welcoming everyone to this historic joint meeting of the Northeast Asia Economic Conference and Northeast Asia Economic Forum at this beautiful convention hall *Toki* in Niigata.

First of all, I would like to extend our deep and sincere appreciation to our host, Governor Hirayama and the Niigata Prefectural Government, Niigata City, and ERINA for hosting this major event which required tremendous effort in preparation. I would also like to express our gratitude to the cooperating institutions: NIRA, the Committee for the Promotion of an Asian Energy, and the East-West Center.

Following the Forum tradition I would like to recognize the presence of the national delegations by introducing the leaders of the delegations, a number of truly distinguished participants from this region and North America. Dr. Duck-Woo Nam, Former Prime Minister of Korea and Chairman of the Korea Committee for the Northeast Asia Economic Forum. With him is Mr. Je chul Kim, Chairman of the Korean Traders Association. Mr. Steve Cowper, Former Governor of Alaska and Chairman of the North American Committee of the Forum, Mr. George Ariyoshi Former Governor of Hawaii, Dr. Kanamori Hisao, Chairman, Kanamori Committee, Japan, Mr. Batbayar, Chairman of the Mongolian Committee for the Forum, Governor Ishaev of Khabarovsk. (Applause after all the introductions).

I would also like to introduce my dear friend, Dr. Song Jian, in the context of the history of the Northeast Asia Economic Forum. At the end of the Cold War with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, an important seed for the idea of a Northeast Asia Economic Sphere may be said to have been planted in the City of Niigata where Dr. Okita Saburo and I co-chaired the 1988 Conference on the Sea of Japan aimed at a vision of a peaceful, cooperative, prosperous Northeast Asia region. There was a similar echo in China, and I had discussions with Dr. Song Jian, who at that time was a vice premier, and the chairman of the SSTC and with the then governor of Jilin Province, Wang Zhongyu, who is currently Secretary-General of the State Council of PRC, about the potential of the Tumen River Basin development in the framework of Northeast regional economic cooperation. The subsequent 1990 Changchun Conference explored the challenging possibilities for the Tumen River area and was the beginning of the Northeast Asia Economic Forum. The Forum was created in 1991 as a regional nongovernmental organization (NGO) to promote peace and stability through functional cooperation in Northeast Asia.

Dr. Song Jian and I organized the 1990 Changchun meeting, marking the beginning of the Tumen River project, and therefore we consider him as a principal initiator of the project and the inspiration behind the Northeast Asia Economic Forum. He has subsequently provided enthusiastic support and encouragement for the activities of the Northeast Asia Economic Forum, in connection not only with the Tumen River project but also with other efforts to promote functional cooperation in Northeast Asia.

This joint meeting beginning today in this beautiful city of Niigata has a special historic meaning. Nine years ago, the fifth Northeast Asia Economic Forum meeting was hosted by the Niigata Prefectural Government. Subsequent meetings were held in

Honolulu, Ulaanbataar in Mongolia, Yonago in Japan, Tianjin and Chungchun in China, and the most recent one in Anchorage, Alaska. During this meeting, we will be renewing our discussions of some of the important topics of regional economic cooperation, which include the Grand Design framework of regional economic cooperation, transportation and logistics, a regional energy community, and establishing a development bank for Northeast Asia. Despite the hazards and difficulties in realizing our vision of economic cooperation and integration in Northeast Asia, all of us have continued our efforts in trying to expand our institutional and personal networks aimed at ever-increasing physical connection and functional integration.

With the inexorable forces of globalization and regionalization at work, regional convergence is inevitable in the long historical process, and I am confident eventually some break-throughs will be achieved through our ceaseless cooperative efforts. For now, let us do our best in discussing some of the challenging topics in the agenda of this conference and move forward. We look forward to the great success of this joint conference.

Thank you for your attention.