

Foreword

The Northeast Asia Economic Forum is an international nongovernmental organization established in 1991 to provide an institutional framework for economic research, discussion and technology exchange in Northeast Asia. It serves as a network for facilitating economic interaction among concerned people and promotes cooperation among institutions in the region. The coordinating mechanism for the Forum is located at the East-West Center.

Members of the Coordinating Group for the NEAEF include Hisao Kanamori, Chairman, Japan Center for Economic Research; Pavel Minakir, Director, Institute for Economic Research, Khabarovsk; Khumbagyn Olzvoy, Director, Policy Planning Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mongolia; Ma Bin, Chairman, Asia-Pacific Institute, China; and Nam Duck Woo, Chairman, Sanhak Foundation, South Korea.

The Northeast Asia Economic Forum was established to take advantage of the dramatic changes in the international climate in the late 1980s culminating in the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end to nearly a century of war, tension, and rivalry in Northeast Asia. This changed political climate provides an opportunity to think broadly and boldly about the future of long neglected portions of Northeast Asia.

The formation of the Forum was based on the shared realization that if history had unfolded differently, and if this region had been a single country, it would already have become one of the world's foremost economic powers. But with the exception of the Japanese and South Korean economies, the individual or collective potentials of Northeast Asia are woefully underutilized. The driving vision of the Northeast Asia Economic Forum is that the factor endowments of developing Northeast Asia can be cooperatively harnessed to generate economic dynamism throughout the region.

With the potential of the region in mind, Dr. Song Jian, Chairman of China's State Science and Technology Commission, focused attention on the possibilities of the Tumen River Basin. To explore this potential, Dr. Song and myself organized the 1990 Changchun Conference on Northeast Asia Economic Development which focused on the economic possibilities for the Tumen River area. Based on this meeting and the concomitant generation of interest among Northeast Asian policy makers, UNDP subsequently implemented a feasibility study of this project.

Despite this initial success, it was and is clear that there is much work left to do in furthering regional economic cooperation. There remain formidable obstacles to realization of the vision. Institutional and bureaucratic barriers, and different social and cultural values, legacies, and attitudes continue to constrain effective regional economic cooperation. To overcome these barriers, the Northeast Asia Economic Forum was created and formalized at conferences on Northeast Asia regional economic cooperation in 1991 in Changchun and

Tianjin. Gaining momentum, the Forum sponsored the 1992 Pyongyang International Conference, at which the possibilities and prospects for economic cooperation with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea were examined, with special emphasis on development of the Tumen River area.

The third stop on this formative journey was Vladivostok. Only a few years ago, few could envision a crossing of the closed tense Sino-Soviet border by a large multinational group from Northeast Asia and the United States. But in August 1992, such a group actually made such a crossing, on foot—courtesy of the Forum network—from Changlingzi to Kraskino en route to the Forum's Vladivostok Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation in Northeast Asia. The Vladivostok Conference reconfirmed the vision and goals of the Forum and called for increased cooperative efforts and activities, including those aimed at the larger Tumen River development area. The Vladivostok Statement called for promotion of "international dialogue, research, and exchange of information concerning economic cooperation in Northeast Asia, including the institutionalization of the annual conference and publication of a regional newsletter."

The 1993 Yongpyeong Conference in South Korea marked the fourth in the series of Forum-sponsored meetings. China sent its participants via a research vessel exploring the Tumen River mouth. The Yongpyeong Statement called for cooperative study of the feasibility of a development banking mechanism for the Northeast Asia region. The Fifth Conference—in February 1995 in Niigata—completed the circle of meetings around the Sea of Japan begun in 1988, and stimulated a revitalization of the Forum and a new round of dialogue and research. This Sixth Meeting of the Forum in Honolulu was the first conference in this new series and we were pleased to have the participation of high level representatives of all Northeast Asian countries including North Korea.

Clearly the Forum has the confidence of relevant policy makers in these countries, and has a proven track record of successful meetings. Indeed, the Forum serves as an outlet and catalyst for a burgeoning epistemic community promoting regional economic cooperation. In short, it is in the vanguard of what is essentially a movement for peace and better relations in the region. It is thus critical that its momentum be maintained.

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Northeast Asia Economic Forum