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Opening Statement

by H.E. Dr. Han Duck Soo

Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea

at the Opening Ceremony

of the 6th Asia Cooperation Dialogue

Foreign Ministers' Meeting

June 5, 2007, Seoul

Foreign Ministers and Heads of Delegation,
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning!

On behalf of the government and people of the Republic of Korea, I would like to thank all of you for taking valuable time out of your busy schedules to attend this meaningful meeting. I also extend to you a warm and heartfelt welcome.

It is with great pleasure that I declare the commencement of the 6th Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) Foreign Ministers' Meeting. I am truly honored for the opportunity to address this gathering of the Foreign Ministers of Asia, through which the peoples of Asia come together each year to exchange views on enhancing regional cooperation.

In the age of globalisation, as distances between regions shrink and national boundaries disappear, we are witnessing an unprecedented flourish in the exchange of ideas, services and products between areas that once held few or no ties. And Asia, undergoing rapid economic transformation, has become the focal point of this grand exchange.

Though Asia is becoming increasingly synonymous with new opportunities, this has not always been the case in the past. For centuries, Asia trailed behind the West in industrial and economic clout. The Asian virtues of passivity and subtlety were interpreted by outsiders as weakness or submission.

But in the 21st century, Asia is awakening from its long slumber. We are now the new forces to be reckoned with in the sectors of economy, trade, political initiatives, tourism, human resources, and many others. Asia is already one of the three spokes of the world economy, and many scholars predict that Asia will be at the front and center of influence within just two decades.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Two contrasting, and indeed opposing trends currently exist in the world, namely the increased competition among countries in a globalized market place and the strengthening of regional integration. These two trends are providing good reason why we, as Asians, should take another look into regional forums like the ACD.

The ACD, as the only pan-Asian regional cooperation mechanism, holds the potential to bring together diverse voices. The ACD will allow us to forge collective economic strategies to maintain Asia's competitiveness vis-a-vis other regional groupings. As other regions come together in the spirit of cooperation, we cannot afford to be the only continent in lack of a regional forum to consolidate our strengths and to project a unified voice in world affairs.

In this light, this year's ACD ministerial meeting is all the more meaningful. The ACD Study Group will be launched, which pools the resources of government officials and the ideas of academics to map out the future directions of the ACD.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The overarching theme of this year's ACD is "the Promotion of IT Cooperation and Bridging of the Digital Divide". Korea, as the host of this meeting and the prime facilitator of various IT cooperation projects, has been working hard to relay its IT developmental experiences to other countries. We are organizing training events and sending IT technicians abroad.

In this regard, to help you better understand the efforts of my government in promoting IT cooperation among ACD members, we have prepared an IT visual presentation and set up an IT booth at the entrance of this hall. Please enjoy our presentations.

The other centerpiece of our discussions at the 6th ACD will be the bridging of the digital divide. The information gap between the haves and the have-nots is more glaring in this age of instant information access and sophisticated communications technology. We should not allow this divide to translate into a rift in the economic and social opportunities of our constituents.

Bearing this in mind, the Korean government proposes to address this divide by organizing education programs for IT experts and by dispatching Internet youth volunteer workers overseas. We are also setting up information access centers in the developing countries in collaboration with reputable international organizations. Accordingly, the Seoul IT Declaration, to be adopted today with the blessing of all participants, illustrates our resolve to address this critical issue.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Historically speaking, a stable security environment is the precondition for continued economic development. In this context, the peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue is a key to securing a stable environment in Asia.

The Korean government remains committed to achieving a peaceful resolution of the nuclear issue through the Six Party Talks framework. The denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula hinges on the success of the Talks. It will allow us to prevent nuclear proliferation in the region.

As you are well aware, the February 13th Agreement represents the first concrete step towards the denuclearization of the Peninsula. It is imperative that the international community continue to pay due attention to positive developments in the Six Party Talks process.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I take this opportunity to invite your attention to two international events that the Korean people wish to host in the next decade : The 2012 Yeosu International EXPO and the 2014 PyeongChang Winter Olympic Games.

Yeosu, a charming city endowed with scenic beauties, located on the southwestern coast of Korea, is a strong candidate to host the 2012 International EXPO under the proposed theme of "The Living Ocean and Coast".

The 2012 Yeosu EXPO will serve as a valuable opportunity to educate the international public on the environmental as well as economic importance of our oceans and coasts. It will provide a common venue for the participating countries to share knowledge and expertise on the ecologically sustainable exploration of the sea's resources. We look forward to your full support, as Yeosu is the only candidate city from Asia bidding for the EXPO.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Winter sports are rapidly gaining popularity among the peoples of Asia. Pyeongchang, with its excellent facilities, is at the center of Korea's bid to become Asia's second country to host the winter Olympics. Since 2004, Korea has been providing the youths and future athletes of Asia, where winter sports facilities are inaccessible, to participate in winter sports programs.

These programs have been highly acclaimed by the international media and the sports community, and I believe that Korea, by hosting the winter Olympics, will be able to provide greater momentum for the development of winter sports and the related industry in Asia.

As during the 2002 FIFA World Cup and the 1988 Olympic Games, the government and people of Korea will spare no effort to ensure the success of the winter Olympics in 2014. I take this occasion to ask Your Excellencies and the delegations for your strong support to our efforts.

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Now, I would like to officially declare the opening of the 6th ACD Foreign Ministers' Meeting. I look forward to many productive and fruitful discussions during the meeting, and hope that you will enjoy your time in Seoul.

Thank you.