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Welcoming Remarks by H.E. Song Min-soon

Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade

of the Republic of Korea

at the Opening Ceremony

of the 6th Asia Cooperation Dialogue

Foreign Ministers' Meeting

5 June 2007, Seoul

Your Excellency Dr. Han Duck-Soo, Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea,
Excellencies, Foreign Ministers and Heads of Delegations,
Distinguished Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor and pleasure for me, on behalf of the government and people of the Republic of Korea, to extend a warm welcome to all distinguished guests and participants on the occasion of the 6th Asia Cooperation Dialogue Foreign Ministers' Meeting.

Excellencies,

Korea has a long history of trade and commerce with many countries in Asia and the Middle East. These trade ties that stretch far back in our history lend even greater meaning to the hosting of this ACD Meeting in Seoul.

As a country with a deep history of ties with countries around Asia, Korea wholeheartedly welcomes the establishment of the ACD as the only continent-wide framework for cooperation in Asia.

Distinguished Guests,

It is now six years since the official launch of the ACD Foreign Ministers' Meeting in 2002. As we reflect on what has been achieved in that time we do indeed have so much to be proud of.

By promoting cooperation through its nineteen projects the ACD has served to strengthen the bonds of partnership among member countries and between the sub-regions of Asia. These initiatives span all areas : ranging from tourism to agriculture to human resources development.

Moreover, the ACD itself has experienced remarkable development, with the initial membership of eighteen having risen to the current thirty member countries. And the ACD is set to develop still further as it is the first forum to aim to eventually encompass all countries of Asia.

And yet, whilst we have come so far in terms of institutionalizing regional cooperation and fostering a sense of a shared Asian identity, this is no time to be complacent.

The ACD is a work in progress, and it is crucial that we constantly search for new ways to realize the great potential this forum offers.

I am confident that the ACD will play an ever more valuable role in providing the countries of Asia with opportunities to exchange views, coming up with fresh ideas and giving more systematic shape to our cooperation.

More importantly, we will, in reaching these goals, continue to respect, value and embrace our diversity. Because forging a shared sense of identity does not mean that we need to forsake in any way our own identities, the traditions and heritage that we value so dearly.

Indeed it is crucial that we celebrate the diversity amongst us, using it as a source of strength.

Distinguished Guests,

Under the theme of "Promotion of IT Cooperation" this year's ACD Meeting is to adopt the "Seoul IT Declaration" which will be a milestone in efforts to address the digital divide in Asia. This is indeed timely.

It is vital that we do not sit back while the digital divide translates into an economic divide and opportunity gap among the peoples of our region.

I look forward to member countries engaging in productive discussions on this and a whole range of issues of great importance to the people of Asia at the 6th ACD Ministerial Meeting. It is my earnest hope that the exchange of views on this occasion will indeed prove highly fruitful.

Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is now my great privilege to invite H.E. Dr. Han Duck-soo, Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea, to deliver his Opening Statement which will officially launch the 6th Ministerial Meeting of the Asia Cooperation Dialogue.

Thank you for your kind attention.