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by

**H.E. Mr. Nitya Pibulsonggram,
Minister of Foreign Affairs
of the Kingdom of Thailand,
at the Opening Ceremony of the
6th ACD Ministerial Meeting
Seoul, the Republic of Korea,
5 June 2007**

Your Excellency Mr. Han Duck-soo,
Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea,
Your Excellency Mr. Song Min-soon,
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade,
Your Excellency Mr. Rho Jun-hyong,
Minister of Information and Communication,
Your Excellency Mr. Ahmed bin Abdullah Al-Mahmood,
Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar,
Distinguished Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege for me, as ACD Coordinator, to address the opening session of the Sixth Asia Cooperation Dialogue Ministerial Meeting in Seoul. On behalf of all the ACD member countries, I wish to express our sincere appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Korea for hosting this distinguished gathering and for the warm welcome and excellent arrangements made for the Meeting.

The Republic of Korea played an active role in establishing the ACD in 2002 and in moving the process forward. The inspiring statement by His Excellency the Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea confirms this important role played by the host country. It also encapsulates the commitment of not only the Republic of Korea but indeed of all member countries **further to consolidate friendship, confidence and cooperation** within the ACD and to continue to move this process forward, under the Korean chairmanship.

So we are here today, to renew this commitment, to take stock of where we are, and to set the direction for our future cooperation for the benefit of our region of Asia.

You may remember that the establishment of the ACD in 2002 coincided with the gradual rise of Asia and, perhaps, a renewed sense of common identity for the region. This peaceful rise of Asia, its renaissance even, is something to be proud of.

Economically, the region has done reasonable well with high of potential for further growth. In 2006, aggregate GDP in developing Asia grew at eight percent according to the Asian Development Bank. At current rates, developing Asia will account for more than fifty percent of global GDP by the year 2030. ACD countries account for almost half of accumulated foreign reserves and more than half of the world's known oil reserves.

This rise in Asia has also been driven, in part, by intensified sub-regional cooperation throughout this continent and the network of linkages between them. From the GCC to ASEAN, from SAARC to the emerging East Asia Community, from the CICA (Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia) and SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) to the ECO (Economic Cooperation Organization). We also have cross linkages between these sub-regions, such as BIMSTEC, which link South Asia with Southeast Asia. All of them have contributed to Asia's rise.

But let us not forget that Asia also faces challenges. Many of us recently came from the 8th ASEM Foreign Ministers Meeting in Hamburg, Germany last week. There, Asia and its challenges loomed large, be they issues of energy or climate change, nuclear non-proliferation or the Middle East. Despite good economic growth figures, 1.9 billion Asians, nearly half of the region's population, still live on under 2 dollars a day. Fifty percent of the region's people do not have access to proper sanitation. Add to these facts are the continuing threat of natural disasters, HIV/AIDS, avian influenza and other diseases and conflict.

Excellencies,

It is against this backdrop of a rising Asia - - but one which still faces many challenges - - that we must view the ACD. For us, the ACD is a new paradigm of cooperation that seeks to build on the natural assets and potential of Asia, to work in tandem with existing frameworks of cooperation, and to deal in a value added way with some of the common challenges faced by the peoples of this continent.

As the region's first ever pan-Asian forum and an increasingly important gathering, the ACD has created a sense of partnership, drawing **on the strength of Asia's** diversity. Now into its sixth year, the ACD has expanded from 18 to 30 member countries, representing every geographical sub-region of our continent. Apart from the Asian Group under the United Nations framework, there is no other forum like ours where countries across Asia, from the Pacific Ocean to the Red Sea, from the Indian Ocean to the Arctic Ocean, are collaborating in as diverse as 19 cooperation areas. This diversity is our strength.

And guided by the unique principles of **informality, positive thinking and comfort level**, the ACD has made progress along two dimensions: dialogue and cooperation.

Dialogue amongst us has contributed towards an **atmosphere of trust and confidence** within a region that is traditionally the most diverse of all regions. This enhanced trust and confidence will not only help lay the basis for a more heightened sense of community among us but also help facilitate cooperation in specific areas of mutual interest.

Indeed, our cooperation, through the practical approach of voluntary Prime and Co-Prime Movers, has enabled all ACD members to **propel key projects** that support sustainable development in a wide range of fields.

Take energy for example. The energy cooperation area, whose co-prime movers include Bahrain, China, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, the Philippines and Qatar, has made significant progress in drafting an **energy blueprint** among member countries. The preparation of the first ACD Energy Ministers' Meeting to be hosted by Pakistan this September marks the first ACD sectoral Ministerial Meeting.

Look at information technology. We have an important flagship project in which the Republic of Korea, the Prime-Mover, will lay the ground work for **bridging the digital divide** within Asia.

So the ACD, in its sixth year, has made progress. Through dialogue and cooperation on specific projects, it has generated an increased sense of partnership within the region. It has served as a conceptual umbrella **covering the sub-regional building blocks for a rising Asia**. It has also given impetus to building a **sense of community in the Asian region**.

All this is well and good. But we must now take the next step. For the ACD to have meaning, it must be able to deliver concrete results. We need to move from conceptual ideas to concerted action, from specific plans to concrete **deliverables**.

In this context, one should ask the question: how will the various cooperation programmes in the 19 sectors concretely better the lives of our peoples?

In the area of energy, for example, how can cooperation in this sector lead to better plans to enable the region more adequately to address its growing energy needs, bearing in mind that at present, ACD countries consume forty percent of the world's energy? In this context, can we look at concrete measures to promote alternative energy? These are some of the questions that I hope will be addressed at the sectoral ministerial meeting in Pakistan, and to which some concrete answers will be offered.

At the same time, we need to look ahead. We need to set the future direction of the ACD. We should therefore set in motion the **High-level Study Group to help define our future direction**.

Key important questions need to be addressed. Here are some of these questions.

What are the envisioned end goals of the ACD? What institutional mechanisms should we create to enhance efficient coordination of activities? Do we need a Secretariat, and if so, what type of Secretariat would it be? How can we ensure adequate financing to implement the ACD's creative ideas? Should the ACD encourage Track II activities to promote "out-of-the-box" thinking? What should we do with new aspirants for membership?
Excellencies,

Through all your efforts over the past five years, we are well on the road to making the ACD realize its potential – becoming a vibrant framework for dialogue and cooperation that will secure concrete benefits for its peoples. And in so doing, we will collectively make Asia a strong partner for development and an important pillar for multilateralism.

But to achieve this, we need to continue to have strong political will in order to maintain strong momentum in this forum. And we need to make real investments in the ACD – in time, in effort and in resources. Thailand, for its part, will continue to support firmly the ACD and to help chart its future direction. I invite all of you to do the same. I am confident that the rich and productive deliberations at this 6th ACD Ministerial Meeting, under the able guidance and leadership of the Republic of Korea, will open yet another chapter in the history of the ACD, one that will bring concrete benefit to the peoples of the member countries and for Asia.

Thank you.