

A Shared Vision for the Future of Korea and ASEAN

-Partnership for Trust and Happiness-

December 10, 2014

The 2014 ASEAN-Republic of Korea Commemorative Summit will be held from December 11 for two days in Busan, Korea. It will be an opportunity for me to get together with the heads of state or government from the 10 ASEAN member states, looking back over the past 25 years of friendship and laying out a blueprint for the promotion of forward-looking relations.

Over these long 25 years, Korea and ASEAN have written an invaluable history.

In 1989, Korea became a Sectoral Dialogue Partner with ASEAN, the first developing country to do so. Korea and the ASEAN members, as developing nations, were able to better understand one another, and building on this common denominator, relations have developed remarkably.

Cooperation between the two sides began with trade, investment and tourism. In just 25 years, ASEAN has become Korea's second largest trading partner, third biggest investment destination and the number one destination for Korean travelers, attracting approximately 4.6 million visitors each year. Since Korea was accorded full Dialogue Partner status in 1991, development cooperation with ASEAN has gone into full swing. From that point on, Korea has steadily concentrated 30 percent of its total official development assistance in the ASEAN region.

Korea has also continued to share with the ASEAN members its experience with Saemaul Undong, a comprehensive rural development campaign that played a great role in Korea's achievement of the "Miracle on the Han River," contributing to its rise from one of the poorest countries. Today, Korea and ASEAN are envisioning together a "Miracle on the Mekong River."

In addition, Korea and ASEAN member states have the common historic memory of the suffering inflicted by imperialist colonial rule and the ideological confrontation of the Cold War era. Still not unified, Korea will mark the 70th year of division next year.

As ASEAN member states have well understood such wounds of history suffered by the Korean people and are maintaining diplomatic relations with both Koreas, they will be of great help in bringing about peace on the Korean Peninsula and eventual reunification.

As of now, the Korean Government is making continued efforts to ease tensions, settle peace and lay the groundwork for peaceful unification of the Korean Peninsula. Peace on the Korean Peninsula and ultimate reunification are important stepping stones as well as prerequisites for realizing peace throughout the East Asian region as well. I look forward to a greater role by ASEAN in ensuring that the North abandons its nuclear program and becomes a responsible member of the international community, which will help peace take a firm root on the Korean Peninsula and unification be realized.

The affinity between Korea and ASEAN further deepened with Korea's pop culture spreading throughout ASEAN starting in the late 1990s. Interest in Korea increased in the region thanks to Hallyu, or the Korean Wave, and thus mutual understanding has been enhanced, which has led to the further promotion of people-to-people exchanges.

As of now, there are about 80,000 immigrants from ASEAN, who have married Koreans and are making their home in Korea, playing the role of a bridge that links people from both sides together. Korea and some ASEAN nations are nurturing close ties comparable to those between reliable family members so that these relationships are often likened to the "relationship of in-laws."

Now is high time for the two sides to go beyond the strategic relationships forged between nations and foster deeper friendly ties among their peoples, building on deepening mutual understanding and empathy. In recognition of this, I put forth a vision of Partnership for Trust and Happiness at the 16th ASEAN-ROK Summit held in Brunei last year.

In the same way that the ASEAN Community, to be established next year, seeks to be a people-centered, sharing and caring community, I hope Korea and ASEAN, with the aim of enhancing the quality of life and happiness of every citizen, will build a more balanced and mutually beneficial relationship.

In such a context, the ASEAN-ROK Commemorative Summit has made its focus the advancement of people-to-people relations.

First, we will launch the ASEAN-ROK Business Council to encourage networking between SMEs, which are fundamental to economic growth in both Korea and the ASEAN region.

Second, we will open an ASEAN culture plaza in Korea that will bring the splendid cultures of Southeast Asia to the Korean people.

Third, in order to enable a greater number of people from ASEAN countries to visit Korea more easily, we will explore measures for simplifying visa procedures, and going further, we will work to create a network of next-generation leaders to form the basis for a more forward-looking relationship.

By producing substantive outcomes that can be felt directly by all of our citizens, we will seek to usher in a time of greater happiness for the people.

Next year will see the launch of the ASEAN Community, the fruit of a half-century of cooperation in the region. It will be a historic accomplishment for ASEAN member states in their pursuit of common goals of economic development and improved quality of life on a foundation of tolerance and understanding.

ASEAN's transformation and growth has captured the world's attention, and the spirit of integration it has demonstrated is something Korea hopes to realize as well, not only in Korea-ASEAN relations but also in Northeast Asia.

Together, let us open a new era of trust and happiness.