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Building on diversity

OVER THE COURSE OF THREE DECADES, the World Economic Forum has grown from humble beginnings as a European economic conference into a unique, multi-stakeholder platform built around 1,000 corporate members. Beginning as a simple gathering in the Swiss Alps, the Forum's Annual Meeting has become the prime gathering of world leaders in business, government and civil society to address the issues and challenges confronting humanity.

To advance global cooperation and support regional development, the Forum turns its attention to the most important regional issues through its country- and region-based Summits. These meetings, held since 1977, have helped to highlight the potential of emerging markets and support their integration into the world economy.

In 1992, the Forum initiated the Europe/East Asia Economic Summit to strengthen economic and business links between the two regions. From its inception as a meeting of 400 participants in Hong Kong, the meeting has grown into the region's foremost gathering based in Hong Kong and Singapore, which were for many years Asia's most international business capitals. This year, the Summit moves to Kuala Lumpur in recognition of the fact that it too has emerged as one of Asia's most vibrant places to do business. Moreover, given the supply of skilled labour, support for the IT and manufacturing sectors, and flourishing financial operating environment, Malaysia stands favourably in the region's growth picture.

The 11th East Asia Economic Summit will take place at the heart of this economy, Kuala Lumpur. Under the patronage of Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad, the Summit will be the foremost annual gathering of Asian business leaders and their counterparts from abroad, where they jointly address common concerns and challenges.

This Summit will be co-chaired by prominent businessmen, namely: Lee Sang-Chul, President and Chief Executive Officer, Korea Telecom, Republic of Korea; Mohd Hassan Marican, President and Chief Executive Officer, Petronas, Malaysia; and Malcolm Williamson, President and Chief Executive Officer, Visa International, USA.

The Summit will provide an excellent vantage point to assess the critical economic, business, trade and geopolitical issues facing the region. Built around the theme Renewing Asia's Foundations of Growth: Building on Diversity, the programme combines panel discussions, brainstormings and interactive briefings. Among the issues to be addressed are:

- * Economic Outlook for the Next 6 to 12 Months
- * Free Trade and the New Round of Trade Talks
- * Terrorism and Its Impact on Asia's Security
- * Rebuilding Asian Competitiveness
- * Asia's New Generation of Leaders
- * Prospects for China and Japan
- * Technology Outlook, and the Market for 3G Telecom Services
- * Multi-ethnicity, Asia's Diversity, and the Role of Religion in Nation-building
- * Corporate Governance and Public Accountability
- * The Future of the Asian Development Model
- * Reviving Asia's Capital Markets and Managing Bank Reform
- * Socially Responsible Asian Corporations

The rapid growth of global communications, information technology and

international business over the past decades has increased the need for a dialogue among all of society's stakeholders around the key issues on the global agenda. The World Economic Forum provides a platform for such dialogue at the global levels; the East Asia Economic Summit is built along similar lines, with specific focus on the opportunities and challenges of Asia in the 21st century.