

## **INAUGURAL MEETING OF THE EAST ASIA FORUM**

### **“EAST ASIAN COMMUNITY – PEACE PROSPERITY AND PROGRESS IN EAST ASIA – CHALLENGES AND VISIONS”**

**THE GRAND INTERCONTINENTAL HOTEL, SEOUL, KOREA 15 DECEMBER 2003**

I would like to thank the organisers of the East Asia Forum for this invitation to speak on “Peace Prosperity and Progress in East Asia – Challenges and Visions”.

2. Someone said that those who forget the lessons of history are condemned to repeat their mistakes over and over again.

3. Obviously history holds many lessons for us, especially for those who lead Governments and Nations. What they do will become a part of history. Obviously future generations would be studying what is being done now to learn the lessons of history; to avoid repeating mistakes.

4. To benefit from the past we have to pick and choose what we want to repeat and what we want to avoid and to forget. Studying history is not for finding justification for the wrong that we want to do now.

5. In Bosnia – Herzegovina following the break-up of Yugoslavia, the Serbs carried out ethnic-cleansing, i.e. the killing of Bosnian Muslims because some five hundred years ago when the Turks invaded the Slavic nations they reputedly massacred a large number of Serbian people. For the Serbs, this justifies their taking revenge now and forever. If the Bosnian Muslims also seek revenge against the Serbs for what they had done recently, obviously there would never be peace between them. The lesson that needs to be learnt by both the Serbs and the Muslims is that revenge begets revenge. No one gains anything by it. Both will live in fear of each other and will never be at peace.

6. Remembering past enmities and perpetuating them would not improve the present situation. The lessons of history is not just about knowing what had happened, but knowing about the mistakes which had brought misfortunes and sufferings in the past and knowing that, to avoid making the same mistakes.

7. That is what is meant by learning the lessons of history. If we do not repeat past mistakes, we would make progress with better chances of success. We would build a better world for ourselves and others.

8. Among the events in the historical past of nations must be the wars and the atrocities and massacres that accompany them. The desire for revenge would be very great. If not revenge, apologies would be demanded. But even if apologies are made the bitter memories would remain. A new relation cannot be developed.

9. Germany and France had been bitter enemies for hundreds of years. Millions of Germans and French people were killed by each other during the two Great Wars and other Franco-German wars. In the last war German troops actually occupied most of France including Paris. The French were greatly humiliated. The allies of the French carpet-bombed German cities reducing them to rubble and killing hundreds of thousands

of German civilians. French troops are a part of the allied occupation force. The Germans in turn have been humiliated.

10. If the French and the Germans are to think of all these atrocities and humiliations they would want to seek revenge, to war against each other again. This was what they did after the First Great War of 1914 – 1918.

11. But after the Second World War, instead of preparing to defend their countries against each other, the French and the Germans decided to work closely together to eliminate war in Europe and to build the European Union. Such is the willingness to work for peace that France allowed German troops to parade in Paris during a national day. Today France and Germany have become the backbone of the European Union. More than that, the refusal of France and Germany to go to war against each other has enabled a Third World War to be avoided. The world has a lot to thank France and Germany for having learnt the correct lessons of history, the readiness to forget and forgive each other.

12. The true lesson of history is that war solves nothing. Nursing anger over what happened during a war and refusing to be reconciled with each other will not bring back the people lost and killed in the war. Adopting a belligerent attitude and expanding massive sums of money on arms merely cause the other side to do the same. Tension would be built up and an uneasy strain would plague relationship all the time.

13. In war both sides must be guilty of cruelty to each other. The winner cannot claim to have been kinder or more honourable. In fact it is by being more cruel and killing more of the enemy that the winner wins. Holding war crimes trials where only the losers are charged is unfair and unjust. How can the complainant be the prosecutor and the judge? Would the allied leaders accept trial by German and Japanese courts had the allies lost? Would the Allied countries consider that justice?

14. We proudly claim that our modern civilisation is the greatest in the history of mankind. We are concerned about human rights, justice and the rule of law. But actually we are no more advanced than the stone age people. This is because we still accept killing people as a legitimate way to solve our problems. We still arm ourselves and train people to kill. Yet we all consider murder as a crime.

15. In a way we are worse than the stone age people. We kill more people than they did. We are still inventing weapons, conventional and non-conventional, which can kill more and more people more efficiently. Now one man pressing a button can kill a million people a thousand miles away. A new clean non-nuclear bomb weighing 27 tons is being tested. How clean can it be to the hundreds of thousands who would be killed and wounded when this enormous murder weapon is dropped on their heads?

16. It is hypocritical that the very same people who are developing more efficient killing machines should also talk of human rights and justice and the rule of law. Democracy is about common consent, not forced submission under threat of death and destruction from pre-emptive strikes using these killing machines.

17. If they are sincere then the only way is to accept dispute settlement by negotiation, arbitration or by submitting to an independent International Court of Justice. Demanding exemption from international courts of Justice contradicts the very concept of justice.

18. If we want to have peace we must be prepared to leave behind the baggage of history. We must remember the past, but only in order to learn of the mistakes and to avoid them. We must stop thinking that our former enemies would try once again to attack us. We must not regard them as a potential enemy or a future enemy against whom we must arm ourselves. Above all we must not think or believe in the justification of pre-emptive attacks. Pre-emptive attacks simply mean open aggression. It must be condemned and proscribed.

19. The old saying that to have peace we must prepare for war is wrong. When we prepare for war, our potential enemy would do the same. The result would be an arms race which would simply increase tension and eventually lead to war. That is the lesson of the Maginot Line against the Siegfried Line.

20. In East Asia there are many countries which had been at war with each other, sometimes repeatedly. To have peace these countries must learn from history that war will not resolve their disputes. Like the French and the Germans they must be prepared to forget past enmity and strive for a new relationship between them, relationship based on friendship and cooperation for mutual benefit.

21. If we can progress to the stage when the wars and the massacres of the past no longer fill our minds when we meet each other then peace would become more possible in the region.

22. There is no more need for anyone to apologise again and again for what happened more than half a century ago. The Germans have not made repeated apologies to the Jews for the holocaust. And the United States have not been asked to apologise for Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

23. It is now more than half a century since the Pacific war was fought and the atrocities committed. Since then there has not been any repeat of the incidences. Since then peace has prevailed.

24. Ever since Man appeared on the surface of the earth he had tried to develop ever more effective weapons of war. He has now reached a level where his weapons can destroy the whole world at one stroke. A nuclear war will leave nothing for the victors or the vanquished. Minor non-nuclear wars are possible but the world should be ready to step in and put a stop to such wars and try the war criminals from both sides fairly.

25. Then there are the pre-emptive wars by the super powers against small nations. The small country may be invaded and occupied and the Government forced to surrender, but the people may not surrender. They would continue to fight, to kill the invaders through guerrilla war or terrorism. In the end the super power would gain nothing, would lose in fact, as it did in Vietnam.

26. Truly war, big or small, is no longer an option for anyone. The money being spent on the development, production and equipment of the so-called Defence Forces are a waste, for the rich as well as for the poor.

27. East Asia would do well to emulate the French and the Germans, to try and live in the present and to build up new relations based on wealth creation and a healthy life-

style rather than confrontations and arming for war. As for the fear of super powers outside East Asia, we must assure ourselves that they are sane enough to realise that Asia is too big for even the strongest of them to conquer and rule.

28. So it is really not worthwhile equipping our forces with heavy and expensive weapons. Instead with the powerful economic clout that we have, we should together ensure that our rights are upheld. In the process peace is maintained and economic growth sustained.

29. We should therefore focus instead on economic cooperation between the East Asian countries. It should be done with an open mind. We have made a good start with the ASEAN + 3 forums. We now have financial cooperation in the form of the Swap Arrangements and the Asian Bond Market.

30. We are now working on the ASEAN Northeast Asia Free Trade Agreement. Slowly we are progressing towards the East Asia Economic Group. The EAEG is not the same as the European Union. It is not even like the European Economic Community, the predecessor of the European Union. It is merely a forum for consultation on matters of mutual interest.

31. It is up to the East Asian countries to decide. It is their future. If others can decide what they want to do for their future, the East Asians have as much right to do so.

32. It must be emphasised that there should be no NATO equivalent in the East Asian Community. We should not design a defence pact which invariably implies that we have an enemy and we want to prepare to fight that enemy. And that enemy will likewise prepare to fight us.

33. Instead our forces should act according to each country's current policies and commitment. Largely they should be for internal security. The countries of East Asia should agree to reduce their armed forces and the sophistication of their weapons. An arms race must be avoided, by agreement.

34. We need a police force for the world, but as in the case of national police, it must be under the control of a world civil authority. A police force that is independent of the Government is a threat to society rather than its protector.

35. The world is getting smaller and what we all do will impact on one another and the world. What others do will impact on us. We must remind ourselves and the world that there is enough room and wealth for everyone. There is no need for anyone to be greedy. Instead we all should strive to prosper the world, for a prosperous world, evenly distributed, will help everyone to become more prosperous. Imagine the poor countries becoming rich. There would be new markets for the products and expertise of the developed rich countries.

36. East Asians can be the model of how relations between countries should be conducted; how capital, science and technology should be employed for the betterment of people. East Asian countries have already individually demonstrated how they can arise from the ashes of war to build great economies. Now collectively we must show the world how we did this and help the rest to develop. In the process not only will East Asia grow and prosper in peace but the world can join us in building a better future.

37. This is the challenge and the vision of East Asia, the challenge to learn from the mistakes of the past and to avoid them, and the vision to develop new relationships between East Asian nations free of historical enmities.