

OECD Southeast Asia Regional Programme (SEARP) Ministerial Conference  
Opening Session  
Welcoming Remarks by Kazuyuki Nakane, State Minister for Foreign Affairs  
March 8, 2018  
(Provisional translation)

Honorable Ministers,  
Distinguished Heads of Delegations, and Representatives of International  
Organizations,  
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to first express my sincere gratitude for your participation in the Tokyo Ministerial Conference of the OECD Southeast Asia Regional Programme, SEARP.

Four years ago, in 2014, Japan marked our 50th anniversary of accession to the OECD. In that commemorative year, Japan chaired the OECD Ministerial Council Meeting and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe launched the SEARP with a view to promoting cooperation between the OECD and Southeast Asia. As the first co-chairs of SEARP, Japan along with Indonesia have been contributing to SEARP actions and activities. It is my great pleasure to welcome the H.E. Dr. Mardiasmo, Vice Minister of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia. Vice Minister Mardiasmo, I would like to express my renewed and profound gratitude for the Government of Indonesia's contributions as co-chair.

This Ministerial Conference is held to sum up the SEARP's activities since its inception and to give further momentum to the Programme. I would like to take this opportunity to extend my heartfelt appreciation to the OECD Secretariat for its devoted efforts to prepare for this Ministerial Conference.

Dating back 50 years from SEARP's launch, 1964 was a significant year for both Japan and the OECD.

In 1964, Japan experienced three remarkable events which impressed Japan's return to the international community in both name and reality: our accession to the OECD, opening of the Tokaido Shinkansen bullet train, and hosting the Tokyo Olympics.

Japan's accession had an important implication for the OECD itself. It meant that the OECD, which had before been a Western-centric international organization, opened its door to a non-founding country from Asia. Japan's accession was a step in the history of the OECD's global outreach, with a number of countries having accomplished accession thereafter.

However, in recent years, circumstances surrounding the OECD's global outreach have changed. While OECD membership has increased, the proportion of OECD member countries' weight in the global economy has been gradually decreasing with the rise of emerging countries. The percentage of total GDP of OECD members to global GDP has declined from 80% in 2000 to 60% in 2015. We face a reality that the OECD is not able to address global challenges if we discuss rules and standards exclusively applicable to OECD members.

In this context, the OECD's global outreach strategy is highly significant to maintain and consolidate its relevance, impact and legitimacy in global governance in socio-economic areas. Particularly, Southeast Asia, which is the "growth center of the world", occupies a special position as a region of "strategic priority interest" within the OECD's global relations. This is why cooperation with Southeast Asia is essential for the OECD.

As co-chair of SEARP, Japan has been emphasizing the three "L"s - Linking, Listening and Learning - based on the OECD's spirit of mutual learning. These were proposed by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the ceremony officially launching SEARP in May 2014.

I participated in the Southeast Asia Regional Forum held in Bangkok, Thailand last August, where I joined the discussion with regard to policy challenges and opportunities brought by digital transformation. While sharing Japan's efforts and views with respect to this issue, I also learned the challenges faced by Southeast Asia, as well as the OECD's knowledge and expertise in this area. I realized that a synergy would be created by "linking" the OECD and Southeast Asia, "listening" to each other's experience, and "learning" mutually.

It is my pleasure that in Today's Ministerial Forum, these three "L"s will be practiced under the theme of "Inclusive ASEAN".

Currently, there is growing anxiety and frustration worldwide on whether globalization and digitalization may increase inequality. It is important to achieve "inclusive growth", carefully listening to the voices of all people. Against this

backdrop, recent discussions and analysis on “inclusiveness” have been rapidly accumulating in the OECD.

ASEAN has also been discussing “inclusiveness”. In this Ministerial Conference, I would like to increase our awareness of the value added of the OECD together with ministers and colleagues from ASEAN. From my point of view, the unique advantage of the OECD in comparison with other international organizations is the following: the OECD can provide policy recommendations and serve as a platform for sharing of best practices, thereby support implementing policies and building institutions. Without policies and institutions, no country can foster good business environment nor attract foreign direct investment. How can ASEAN make the best use of the OECD? This is exactly what we are going to discuss in this Ministerial Forum.

Lastly, let me briefly introduce some of Japan’s efforts toward achieving “inclusive growth”.

The Government of Japan, under “Abenomics”, is undertaking various actions in order to realize “a society in which all citizens are dynamically engaged”. It is an inclusive society where all actors of the society will be fully active, and create a “virtuous cycle of growth and distribution”.

For example, the Japanese Government boosts actions for reforming working-style so that people facing various circumstances such as child-rearing and nursing care can work with high motivation and everyone can exercise their competence. In addition, the Government advances our “human resources development revolution”, including by ensuring opportunities, for everyone even adults, to further develop their professional skills.

Today, March 8 is “International Women’s Day”. Pursuing “a society in which all women shine” is also a priority issue of the Japanese Government. Hosting the World Assembly for Women (WAW!) every year since 2014, Japan has been leading the discussions toward “a society in which all women shine”, inviting leaders from all over the world including Southeast Asia who are actively engaged in the field of women’s empowerment.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me conclude my remarks by sharing my expectation for this Ministerial Forum to be a good opportunity for fruitful discussions and sharing experiences under the spirit of three “L”s proposed by Prime Minister Abe four years ago.

I strongly hope that OECD-ASEAN cooperation will become more intense with the start of “SEARP 2.0”. Japan, serving as a bridge between the OECD and ASEAN, will continue to make our best efforts through SEARP.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.