

**Remarks by  
President Lee Myung-bak  
at the IUCN World Conservation Congress  
Jeju, Korea**

**Opening Remarks**

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen,

Along with all Koreans as well as the citizens of Jeju, I am pleased that this beautiful island is the first Northeast Asian host of the World Conservation Congress.

It is very significant for the Republic of Korea to be hosting this Congress on the environment after having hosted the G20 Summit on the economy and the Nuclear Security Summit on security.

My special gratitude goes to President Ashok Khosla of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, IUCN Director-General Julia Marton-Lefevre, ambassadors to Korea, IUCN members and many other distinguished guests from home and abroad for being here today.

**Recent Crises and the Necessity for Preservation of Nature**

The British poet William Wordsworth once wrote: "'tis [Nature's] privilege,/ Through all the years of this our life, to lead/ From joy to joy." Nature is a source of spirituality and a haven like our mother's warm embrace.

Moreover, nature is the source of all our daily necessities and determines the basic quality of life. Our daily meals come from nature and approximately 70 percent of medicinal substances are also obtained from nature. The issue of how well nature can be preserved and wisely utilized has a direct bearing on each and every life.

Today, however, the health of nature has been severely compromised. Because of reckless development, biodiversity has been reduced with more than 20,000 species becoming extinct every year. Roughly 50,000 km<sup>2</sup> of

forestland, about one fourth the size of the Korean Peninsula, is disappearing. Climate change causes floods or droughts all over the world, posing threats to human life.

The international community has thus far continued a variety of efforts to preserve nature. Notably, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, since its registration as the first non-governmental advisory organization to the United Nation, has always played a pivotal role in environmental preservation activities. It also took up crucial roles in the process of concluding the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity. I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the organization for its contributions to and achievements in preserving nature and the environment across the globe over the past 64 years.

#### Experience of the Republic of Korea

Distinguished guests,

Jeju Island is a treasure trove of nature; the volcanic island and lava tubes have been included on UNESCO's World Heritage List. It was also designated as a World Geopark and a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO. The Hanon Crater, which is expected to preserve ecological history dating back over 50,000 years, is being restored. Here on Jeju, I want to share with you the Republic of Korea's experience and vision with regard to the restoration and preservation of nature.

Just 60 years ago, the entire land of the Republic of Korea was devastated because Koreans traditionally cut trees for firewood. In the process of rapid industrialization, however, coal briquettes became the alternative fuel, and the cutting of trees dwindled. Better yet, the Korean Government designated Arbor Day to fall on April 5 when newly planted trees grow well. Over the past decades since then, all Koreans have worked hard for mountain reforestation. As a result, the bare hills turned into green mountains in the span of just one generation. Korea has now become an above average OECD country in terms of forestation. Lester R. Brown, an environment activist and the founder of the Worldwatch Institute, praised Korea as being a reforestation model for the rest of the world.

Unlike what we did for forests, however, we paid little attention to rivers, which were unavoidably polluted in the process of rapid development. Korea, however, embarked on river restoration once the economy was placed on a growth trajectory. Thanks to such efforts, Cheonggyecheon, a stream that runs through the center of Seoul, and many other tributaries severely contaminated by sewage from homes and factories have been transformed into ecologically friendly waterways inhabited by numerous species. Nature did not ignore our hard work and responded with astounding resilience.

Taking it a step further, the Republic of Korea declared Low Carbon, Green Growth as a new vision for national progress in 2008. Conventional wisdom has it that environmental conservation is on a collision course with economic growth. However, green growth is an outside-the-box strategy for conserving the environment through green industries and technologies while simultaneously creating new growth engines and job opportunities. To realize the vision of green growth, the Korean Government formulated the Five-Year Plan for Green Growth and has upheld the green budget principle of investing two percent of GDP every year in green and new growth sectors over the past four years.

On top of this, the Government has carried out the Four Major Rivers Restoration Project with a view to dealing with such disasters as floods and droughts caused by climate change. As a result, the management of water resources has been greatly improved, thereby playing a significant role in overcoming recurring floods and droughts. Other effects of the Project include the restoration of river ecosystems, creation of new job opportunities and establishment of an infrastructure for green tourism. Thailand and many other countries experiencing difficulties in managing water are benchmarking this Project.

The slogan of the Congress is Nature +, which shares a common denominator with green growth in that it aims to strike a balance between conservation of natural resources and their sensible utilization.

#### **Policy Vision for Environmental Conservation**

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

This year the Government of the Republic of Korea has come up with a new policy vision for environmental preservation whose core value is that “flourishing nature makes people happy.”

To realize the goal, the Government formulated three different policy objectives and will implement them.

First, through the efforts to restore and conserve the natural environment, it will protect habitats of living creatures and maximize the value of the land. As of now, the natural ecological reserves only represent about 10 percent of the nation’s surface area. The Government will expand the protected areas on a continued basis. In particular, the Government will redouble its efforts to preserve national parks, which maintain a healthy ecosystem, thereby securing pivotal areas for the conservation of biodiversity.

Second, the Government will establish a framework that enables us to utilize natural resources in a sensible manner for sustainable green growth. The Government will endeavor to reinvigorate sustainable eco-tourism that will be of help to local economies. It will also render assistance for the investigation and research into biological resources on the Korean Peninsula and strengthen international collaboration. In addition, it will work to overhaul the environmental impact assessment for the sake of a balance between development and conservation. The green infrastructure such as green spaces that helps bring nature to city life will be expanded.

Third, for the purpose of preserving Mother Nature and promoting biodiversity on the Korean Peninsula, the Government will implement measures to conserve and restore the three main pillars of our nation’s ecosystem. They include *Baekdudaegan*, a mountain range that runs most the length of the Korean Peninsula, the demilitarized zone (DMZ) and many islands and coastal areas in the East, West and South Sea.

Notably, the DMZ carries added significance at home and abroad as it is emerging as an ecological repository after returning to life from the ruins of war. *The World without Us*, a book renowned the world over, depicts the DMZ as an unique commons where numerous precious species that cannot be replaced have been revived. As the author of the book exhorts, believing that reconciliation and coexistence between nature and

human beings as well as among human beings is possible is a genuinely noble value. I have a plan to turn the DMZ on the Korean Peninsula into the quintessential space for ecology and peace, thereby publicizing widely the value of peace and the natural environment across the globe.

#### Efforts for International Cooperation

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

The global village in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is distinctly characterized by mutual dependence in every field. Preservation of nature is no exception. In order to save the earth, all nations must work together recognizing that they are bound by a common destiny.

Fortunately, the Republic of Korea has been able to become a donor nation from the status of a recipient. The country will not forget all the support it has received from the international community all along. For one thing, it is ready to share with the world the experience it accumulated in the course of a forestation and anti-desertification movement.

The Korean Government will fulfill the promises it made at the Rio+20 Summit that took place in Rio de Janeiro in June. That is, the Republic of Korea will actively participate in the global green growth partnership by expanding its green Official Development Assistance to more than US\$5 billion in total by 2020. Simultaneously, the nation will proactively pursue the successful global launching of the Green Climate Fund in accordance with the agreement that was concluded at the end of 2011 at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Durban, South Africa.

This year also saw the inauguration of the Global Green Growth Institute, or the GGGI, which aims at supporting international collaboration and assisting developing nations in green growth. On the sidelines of the Rio Summit, the GGGI was turned into a full-fledged international body at a signing ceremony attended by the 16 founding member countries, participating summit leaders and the UN Secretary-General. The Korean Government will spare no effort in helping the GGGI become a viable, strategic international consultative body promoting green growth around the world.

In addition, the Korean Government also established the Green Technology Center in March for the purpose of strengthening international exchanges and cooperation in technological matters while fostering green growth engineers and technologists. As such, Korea will create a green triangle formed by the three essential sides of strategy, technology and abundant resources. By doing so, the country will serve as a bridge linking the developing and developed countries in terms of green growth.

#### Action Plans for Preservation

Distinguished guests from home and abroad,

Now all of us have come to a point where we must put in place a set of creative, concrete action plans based on what we have pledged and promised so far. To this end, I understand that this IUCN World Conservation Congress has scheduled the World Leaders' Dialogues for the first time. Through the Leaders Dialogues, preeminent leaders and specialists are to discuss relevant global environmental issues and present visions. In the process, I hope both professionals and the general audience will be able to communicate with each other and come up with broad-based ideas for effectively preserving nature. Moreover, I hope that the Leaders Dialogues will evolve into the World Leaders' Conservation Forum.

I understand that this Congress plans to adopt the Jeju Declaration that will stipulate advanced principles and action plans regarding preservation of nature. The first such declaration in the history of the WCC promises to harness the wishes of the members, enhancing the status of the IUCN. The Korean Government will strengthen the partnership with the IUCN and actively spread the highly expected outcomes of this Congress.

As the famous adage goes, "Nature always wins in the end." Ultimately, nature is mightier and greater than any other thing. The key to solving critical issues facing humanity is to strive to help raise nature's resilience and to seek harmonious coexistence with Mother Nature.

Separated from nature, we cannot imagine ways to resolve climate change, poverty, or shortages of water, food and energy resources. In order to find fundamental answers, let us all join forces and build a planet-

responsible civilization based on peaceful coexistence between nature and humanity.

Once more, I congratulate each one of you on the 2012 IUCN World Conservation Congress and hope that it will reap an abundant harvest, presenting fresh visions for humanity and nature.

Thank you very much.

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