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Opening Statement

by

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at

International Conference on the Strengthening of

Regional Cooperation to Promote Democracy

Seoul

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H.E. Doru Costea, State Secretary of Romania,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor for me to deliver an Opening Statement at this International Conference on the Strengthening of Regional Cooperation to Promote Democracy hosted by the Korean Government.

I would like to extend my special thanks to H.E. Doru Costea, State Secretary for Global Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, who has traveled all the way from Bucharest to co-chair today's meeting. I also wish to express my sincere appreciation to all the participants for graciously accepting the invitation to attend this Conference.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The remarkable spread and consolidation of democracy around the world in the last couple of decades has indeed been notable. According to the Freedom House Report this year, 147 countries out of 194 are considered to be "free" or "partly free" and 115 countries are assessed as electoral democracies. Regrettably, however, the same report also finds that global freedom suffered its fifth consecutive year of decline, with a drop in the number of "free" countries and electoral democracies.

We can see a glimmer of hope for democracy as a universal value in the current situation in the Middle East and North Africa. At the same time, however, continuing reports of the violation of human rights and the loss of the lives of peaceful protesters serve as a stark reminder to us of how arduous the path of democratization is. It serves as a wake-up call for all of us never to be complacent with the progress in democracy around the world.

Significance of Regional Cooperation to Promote Democracy

It is against this backdrop that regional and international cooperation to promote and consolidate democracy has been assuming increasing significance in recent times. In certain circumstances, regional and international cooperation even prove to be vital in the establishment or restoration of democracy in the country concerned. The situation in Cote d'Ivoire stands as a case in point.

In this regard, I would like to invite your particular attention to the importance of regional cooperation for the following reasons.

First, through the exchange of experience and best practices, countries with similar historical and cultural backgrounds can learn from each other, helping each other to move towards even more mature and thriving democracies. Democracy is not a static or accomplished “state”, but a constantly changing “process”. It is therefore vital that the development of democracy in a country continue to be supported and facilitated by regional dialogue and engagement.

Second, regional cooperation enables us to preempt or deter the retreat of democracy when a threat to democracy occurs. Most threats to democracy, such as terrorism, intolerance and extremism, organized crime and corruption, know no national boundaries. What we have often found is that it is common and coordinated responses which prove to be effective.

Third, regional cooperation for the promotion of democracy leads not only to the advancement of democracy itself, but to peace and economic development in the region. There is wide recognition that democracy and economic development are mutually reinforcing. And in reflecting upon the relation between democracy and peace, it is important to bear in mind the view that democratic countries are more likely to resolve conflict peacefully.

Last, with the development of information and communication technology, it is no longer appropriate to think of democracy at the domestic level. As SNS, such as Twitter and Facebook, prompt the instant propagation of information around the world, democratic values are also spreading rapidly across borders. Consequently, cooperation with neighboring countries in the promotion of democracy is becoming increasingly inevitable.

Overview of Regional Cooperation to Promote Democracy

In this regard, it is with great satisfaction that I note the sustained development of regional cooperation for the promotion of democracy around the world, especially in Europe, the Americas and Africa. In particular, the democratic progress in Eastern Europe through regional cooperation, since the end of the Cold War, has been remarkable.

Whilst it may be that Asia is something of a late-starter in seeking regional cooperation for democracy, it is true also that there has been a growing enthusiasm for the development of regional cooperation in recent years. It is my sincere hope that as we deepen our bonds of cooperation this shall generate even stronger momentum for democratic advances in Asia.

Situation in North Korea

It is deeply regrettable, however, that North Korea still remains one of the most dictatorial and authoritarian regimes in the world. And the people in North Korea continue to face dire situations, suffering political oppression, human rights violations and extreme poverty. I believe that the international community has responsibility to help North Korea improve its human rights situation and take the path of democracy.

Korea's Experience

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Republic of Korea is often cited as a model case of achieving democracy and economic growth based upon a free-market economy at the same time, in a single generation. We did indeed encounter adversity on the path to democracy, but these hurdles never stopped us in our determined pursuit of the noble goal of democracy. We cherish the democracy we enjoy today and will continue to strive for its further consolidation.

At the same time, the Korean Government is seeking to play an even greater role in the regional and international cooperation for democracy. We have been chairing the Asia-Pacific Democracy Partnership since 2008 for the promotion of democracy in the Asia-Pacific region. We are also actively pursuing strengthened cooperation with the Bali Democracy Forum. Last year, H.E Lee Myung-bak, President of the Republic of Korea, co-chaired the Third Forum with H.E. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, President of Indonesia. As part of the efforts to contribute to the regional and inter-regional cooperation for democracy we have also been co-chairing the Community of Democracies Working Group on Regional Cooperation with Romania since last year.

Closing

Ladies and Gentlemen,

While resilience is one of the key features of democracy, it is undeniable that democracy is not irreversible. The full support and cooperation of the regional and international community are therefore invaluable for the sustainable development of democracy.

I am much encouraged to see today an array of participants from countries, regional and international organizations and NGOs leading the regional and international efforts to promote democracy. It is my sincere hope that this Conference does indeed provide you all with a valuable opportunity to pool your wisdom. I trust that all of you will leave with an even stronger determination to unite in your efforts for the noble cause of democracy.

Thank you. /End/