

Asan Plenum 2011

“Our Nuclear Future”

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Chairperson, The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

Minister Kim Sung-hwan, your Excellencies, and distinguished participants,

It is a great privilege for me to welcome, on behalf of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, so many of the world's leading experts and authorities on nuclear issues. I would like to thank you all for taking the time to come to share your wisdom and concern on an issue for which finding the correct resolution is vital to the destiny of the human race.

Since many of you are not yet familiar with the name Asan Institute, please allow me to take a moment to explain what our institute stands for. Asan, sometimes suspected of being a typographical error for Asian by international relations experts, is the endearing pen-name of the late Mr. Chung Ju-Yung, the founder of the Hyundai Group. The Asan Institute for Policy Studies was launched three years ago with the generous support from one of his sons, Dr. Chung Mong Joon, currently a six-term National Assemblyman of Korea, for the purpose of carrying on the spirit of the late Chairman Chung's life-long dedication to enhancing prosperity and peace on the Korean Peninsula. The Asan Institute strives to fulfill its mandate by addressing the most critical problems faced by the Korean nation and Northeast Asia region as a whole, being aware that no major problem in the world today can be resolved without active participation and cooperation from the entire global community. The Asan Institute actively engages itself in policy development, non-governmental diplomacy, and the training of experts in the areas of national security and foreign policy as well as governance and public policy. Currently, the research staff is comprised of 8 Ph.D. holding senior researchers, 7 junior researchers, several visiting scholars, and numerous undergraduate interns.

We are living in a world where the ability to understand, communicate, and sympathize with peoples who belong to different cultures is becoming just as critical as expert analysis of particular issues. As President Kennedy pointed out half a century ago, the development of the instruments of war far outpaces the development of the instruments of peace. The time allowed us to reverse this dangerous situation is short. Responding to the changing needs of our times, the Asan Institute is also interested in promoting dialogues among civilizations. The most recent Asan Memorial Lecture was given on the topic of the modern interpretation of Confucianism by Tu Wei-ming who, after his retirement from the Harvard University faculty, is now working in China.

The Asan Plenum, entitled “Our Nuclear Future,” is the first ever international conference of such scale to be undertaken by our institute. It was planned with a view to assist the second Nuclear Security Summit, scheduled to take place in Seoul in March of next year, to produce the kind of result which we all so eagerly await. Although the Plenum was conceived long before the disaster which struck our neighbor Japan this past spring, the time and place for a world plenum on nuclear issues could not have been more appropriately chosen. As those of us gathered here are all too aware, the outcome of the Summit cannot exceed the level of expertise and wisdom found among the community of experts who deal with these matters day and night. In this sense, what the participants here come up with at the end of this Plenum will have a direct and enormous impact upon the degree of success the World Summit will have next year.

Once again, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who made this plenum possible, especially our Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade for its generous support and the Organizing Committee of the Asan Institute headed by Dr. Hahm Chaibong, who had to make many trips around the globe to consult with colleagues who agreed with him on the desirability of holding such a preliminary “summit” of the experts. Here we are, all gathered together to deal with a force which can either be the good fairy’s magic wand in the service of humanity or turn into the bad witch’s curse. I sincerely hope that by the end of this Plenum each of the participants can return home with a sense of pride and gratification that, by pooling our resources, we have personally contributed to helping to reassure that nuclear power will remain the magic wand we all want it to be and not degenerate into the witch’s curse.