

Asan Plenum 2012

“Leadership”

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Your Excellencies, Dr. Chung Mong Joon, and dear participants, it is a great honor for me to welcome you all to the *Asan Plenum 2012* and to introduce our keynote speaker.

This is only the second time the Asan Institute has hosted a conference of this scale. As most of you already know, the Asan Institute for Policy Studies is a privately funded think tank inspired by the ideal of overcoming poverty and securing lasting peace and prosperity not only for Korea but for the entire world community. This was the ideal to which our namesake “Asan,” the late Mr. Chung Ju-Yung, the founder of the Hyundai Group, dedicated his life. His son, our founder, Chung Mong Joon, the seventerm elected national assemblyman, thought that he would continue his father’s work. If the late Mr. Chung had tried to attain his ideal by producing better goods and services, the younger Mr. Chung thought that he would carry on his father’s heritage by helping enhance the quality of public policy making and implementation. The Asan Institute strives to achieve this purpose first, by promoting research on public policy issues of foremost priority in the world, providing venues for exchange of ideas and opinion among experts from different walks of public life, including academic specialists, and lastly by serving as a training ground for future public policy makers.

The Plenum, as the word should indicate, is the most comprehensive of the many conferences and seminars organized by the institute every year. *The Asan Plenum 2011* was dedicated to the most critical issue of our nuclear future. It was partly in anticipation of the Seoul Nuclear Security Summit, which just took place last month with great success. This year, we chose the topic, which is no less critical, ‘leadership.’ In light of what happened in West Asia and Africa during the past year or two, and what might be expected to happen after this year’s multiple elections are over, the critical importance of leadership is very much on everyone’s minds. But, no one at this point is sure what leadership really means. After the ordeal everyone connected with Iraq had gone through, some people, not just cynics, began to wonder if even Saddam Hussein was the worst leader that Iraq could have had. What is leadership and how much can be expected of it in these days of democracy—bordering sometimes on mobocracy—and also Internet terrorism?

It is my happy duty to introduce or present to you someone who is far better equipped than I to explain to you why it is so important to raise the issue of leadership at this particular moment. Here is a true expert and leader—well seasoned both in theory and practice of political leadership—Dr. Lee Hong-Koo, the former prime minister of the Republic of Korea. It may seem like an affront even to try to introduce someone who already has such a high profile, but please let me just summarize briefly his lustrous vitae, thus reminding us of what sort of person we are with here.

Upon graduation from the elite Kyunggi High School in Korea, he went to the United States to study at Emory University, and received a Ph.D. from Yale, specializing in political science. His dissertation was on the pivotal issue of social conservation, which is to remain his lifelong concern. Upon returning to Korea, Dr. Lee Hong-Koo taught political science at Seoul National University and became a leading opinion maker. In 1988, he was appointed the Minister of National Unification, and then became the

prime minister. Dr. Lee Hong-Koo is the founding president and the current chairman of Seoul International Forum, and also a member of the Madrid Club, a gathering of former heads of state. Although officially retired from politics now, Dr. Lee is still the big hand behind the scenes who makes things work, both in domestic politics and in international relations. For instance, he still sits as the chairman of the Presidential Council on Unification. He co-chairs the National Commemorative Commission established on the 60th anniversary of the Korean War. He also is organizing the World Conservation Congress, which will take place on Jeju Island in the coming September.