

**Welcoming Remarks by  
President Lee Myung-bak  
at the XXIII World Congress of the  
International Union of Forest Research Organizations**

August 23, 2010

Distinguished guests from home and abroad,

I wholeheartedly welcome all of you to the Republic of Korea.

I congratulate you once again on the opening of the 23<sup>rd</sup> IUFRO World Congress in Seoul. I also thank IUFRO President Lee Don Koo and many other officials for their dedicated efforts to organize this meaningful event.

Despite suffering war and poverty, the Republic of Korea has successfully turned its bleak and barren mountains into green and lush forests in a short period of time. For this reason, I am filled with special emotion to see this significant congress being held in Seoul.

Once again, I would like to offer my warmest welcome to all the distinguished participants who came from some 100 countries to join us here today.

Forests are the source of life. They are fundamental to human life and the first source of energy; they can be said to serve as the earth's lungs, purifying the water and air. In addition, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) recognized that forests are the single reservoir to absorb and store carbon dioxide in the midst of the daunting challenges posed by climate change. They also act as the bastion in the prevention of desertification.

Unfortunately, forests half the size of the Korean Peninsula are disappearing each year. From the Amazon rainforest in Brazil only, an area

the size of three soccer fields is deforested every single minute.

Forests can absorb about 15 percent of greenhouse gas emissions from the use of fossil fuels. On that account, leaders from countries around the world met in Copenhagen at the end of last year and agreed to a plan for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD).

In my Liberation Day speech about a week ago, I emphasized that in an era of Green Growth, it was necessary to have a highly cultivated attitude that even takes into consideration the forests in the Amazon and polar bears in addition to the wellbeing of individuals and families. Only when we cherish all living creatures as much as we do our own bodies will we be able to find ways for all humanity to survive.

Distinguished guests,

The land of the Republic was once full of bare red mountains. Nevertheless, the Korean people successfully transformed them into thickly wooded, green mountains in the span of only two generations. It can be ascribed to the fact that people used coal briquettes instead of firewood and planted many trees in mountains across the nation.

As of now, Korea ranks fourth among OECD nations in terms of the percentage of forests to total land; this is a clear reminder that economic development and environmental conservation can go together.

Two years ago, Korea announced a new national vision of Low-Carbon, Green Growth. The nation now remains committed to developing new energy sources that will replace fossil fuels and has come up with new plans to establish a low-carbon transportation system and buildings. On top of this, the Government is making great efforts to implement various policies aimed at helping to firmly root lifestyles conducive to saving resources in our society.

As a pilot project, businesses that find cutting greenhouse gas

emissions a daunting task have joined the Carbon Offset scheme, under which they have to plant trees, instead. Many Korean companies are planting and taking care of trees not only at home but on foreign soil, including Indonesia and nations in South America.

My strong conviction is that through these efforts, we can save the earth and revive the economy as well.

As a matter of fact, since the green growth vision was made public, the number of job opportunities in the new and renewable energy sector has tripled and sales quadrupled.

In the forest sector, social enterprises are emerging one after another. The forestation project has helped create a total of 50,000 new job opportunities annually. The biomass project, which makes use of byproducts stemming from forest management operation, has swung into full gear.

Forests and water are invaluable gifts to humanity.

As IUFRO President Lee Don Koo commented a little while ago, I created an urban park that is well landscaped with water and trees during my tenure as Mayor of Seoul. A large development project was planned for the site of the Seoul Forest where you planted trees yesterday. Based on the judgment that a forest park would have long-term benefits that would far outweigh instant economic gains, however, the site was developed into a forest.

Now Seoul is well on its way to having a green forest in its center as well as streams where fish frolic in clean water. Not long ago, citizens were more used to asphalt and cement surrounding, but now they have begun to breathe clean air from the woods and enjoy peaceful nature.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

In order to achieve sustainable growth, humanity must put on hold

their greed to abuse forests. Together, we have to put a viable Planet-conscious System in place so that the earth and humanity will be able to thrive in harmony. Forests constitute a life-sustaining system for humans, and are about to serve as a new growth engine.

We already have three major international conventions involving climate change, bio-diversity and prevention of desertification. But these agreements can only be carried out successfully when we take up preservation and utilization of forests as a common task and act on it.

To that end, the Republic of Korea will spare no effort.

The Korean Government is proposing the establishment of the Asian Forest Cooperation Organization with the vision of sharing its experiences and technologies with other countries concerning preservation of forests. My Administration will also collaborate closely with the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI), which was inaugurated recently to promote the green movement.

This World Congress is to hold discussions on the theme “Forests for the Future: Sustaining Society and the Environment.” Serious exchanges of views are expected on the pressing issues of how to put an end to the continuing deforestation and on how to enhance the quality of forests. As a result, I trust that the meeting will reap an abundant harvest.

I am very pleased to welcome such a group of eminent experts representing diverse countries and international organizations, including the United Nations. While staying in Korea, I hope you will have an opportunity to appreciate the cultural and historical legacies of this country as well as the Seoul Forest and other wooded areas.

As I convey once again my warm heart to every one of you, I hope your visit to Korea is a joyous and rewarding one.

Thank you very much.