



OPENING REMARKS

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Regional Forum on Reinventing Government in Asia

Building Trust in Government: Innovations to Improve Governance

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Mmes., Messrs Ministers,
Members of Parliament, Senior Officials, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor for me to open the Regional Forum on behalf of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. I would like to thank each person who could be here today, as well as participating Member States for acknowledging the importance of improving governance and public administration in what has become an increasingly complex and inter-dependent world.

I would also like to give our special thanks to Minister Lee of the Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs which has actively been promoting innovations that improve governance for partnering with us to organize this event. Recently, we have been fortunate on many accounts to benefit from an ongoing partnership with MOGAHA. We were able to partner with MOGAHA to organize the 6th Global Forum, which the Republic of Korea hosted with our support in 2005. We will also be working together for the 7th Global Forum, which the United Nations will host this coming June, in Austria, on Building Trust in Government. And we have also received the support of the Government to establish what is now the new United Nations Project Office on Governance, which will be located in Seoul, to consolidate efforts to reinvent government. I would therefore like to extend our true appreciation for our partners' ongoing commitment to regional and global cooperation, as well as their willingness to co-host and organize the Regional Forum together with UNDESA and the UNDP.

Finally, I would like to thank the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which has

acted as an ongoing partner to UNDESA in support of government reinvention on many occasions and which lends its experience, expertise, and coordination to many of our events. Today, we have Mr. Jak Jabes here representing the UNDP, and I would like to thank him and his office for their involvement.

This Regional Forum on Reinventing Government in Asia is one of six meetings that are taking place over the course of 2006 in preparation for the 7th Global Forum. Two have taken place already for the Pacific Islands and the Arab States regions, and this Fall we have several more planned for Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. The conclusions that we reach here this week will help to influence the trajectory of the Global Forum and will also be presented to all participants during the event.

One of the reasons that we are here today is that it is increasingly acknowledged that Member States must have improved governance and public administration capacity to effectively implement their policy objectives. At the 2005 World Summit, governance capacity development was tied to every major item on the UN development agenda, including the Millennium Development Goals. It was tied to the eradication of poverty and hunger, economic growth and development, access to services, employment, health, education, gender equality, protection of vulnerable groups, social integration, countries with special needs, resource management, technology, security, and the global partnership for development.

Governance capacity means getting better information about the types of policies that would best serve citizens and address our objectives better knowledge about methods of implementing these policies in the most efficient and effective way, given limited resources better and more productive support from citizens and businesses to comprehend and contribute to the decision making process and better ability to form partnerships for the benefit of our societies.

Trust is the cornerstone of good governance, because it forms the basis of social cooperation, partnerships, and the implicit social pact that holds each of our societies together and the world as a whole.

It determines how people and organizations can work together to pursue mutual goals and whether they each contribute their own skills, knowledge, and capacities toward improving the world in which we live. It determines how we interact on a daily basis with members of society, whether or not there is effective communication, how much support governments receive, and whether partnerships are possible, or government struggles beneath the burden of acting alone. And it determines how effective the policies that we choose are, whether they are credible,

whether they work and are sustainable, and what the costs of implementation are.

When governments can earn the trust of their citizens, we can accomplish more and more effectively and more efficiently than we could otherwise. With a lack of trust, it requires significantly more effort on the part of stakeholders and more resources to accomplish the same goals, such as development. The challenge then becomes, in very different contexts, how to maintain the trust that we do have, how to strengthen it, and, in cases where it is scarce, how to keep it from deteriorating further and slowly help to build it up once more, so that at some point in the future, each nation is able to move toward achieving its best potential for citizens. Moreover, how can government respond to meet citizen expectations, how do we help to make sure that expectations correspond to what is really possible for government to effectively deliver, and how do we encourage citizens, as well as the private sector, to assume full civic responsibility?

While trust provides the basis for interactions at all levels, it is particularly critical within the context of public administration, where leadership and vision can help to set the standard for the rest of the nation.

One reason why we have decided to begin addressing the issue of trust within the Global and Regional Forums on Reinventing Government is because, recently, there has been some evidence that trust in government has been declining at the global level. This is not in reference to any one particular region or country, but is a world-wide phenomenon. In some areas, this is more pronounced than in others. There are also a series of different ways of looking at trust in government, whether you are looking at trust in institutions, elected officials, the political process, the judicial process, local government, central government, ethical practices, trust in the online environment, economic growth and stability, and so on.

But the bottom line is that we need to start paying attention to how to strengthen trust as a key factor for improving governance, because, in this time of increasing population growth and globalization, our ability to survive and prosper, sustainably, as a species depends on it.

Asia, as a broad and diverse region, has historically been associated with higher levels of trust in many areas, but also faces challenges and cannot be complacent in a scenario of rising expectations and increasing citizen participation.

In the context of our meeting here this week, the question then becomes what can be done to enhance trust and improve governance within different contexts. In the past, it was not all that

infrequent for people to point to a model and say "follow this." There clearly is no one model.

However, we can all learn from each other's experience, which is why we are providing a platform for Member States to share their own best practices in enhancing trust and improving governance.

The particulars of how this is accomplished can vary considerably between nations. However, there are some similarities in terms of the over-riding approaches that have been shown to work over time, toward building trust/improving governance:

The commonalities include:

- Transparency effective communication of what the government is doing and why; and
- Accountability so that incentive structures enable the leaders in charge to set the examples for staff and citizens and encourage pride in public service.

They also involve:

- Participation to get input from citizens (civil society organizations and the private sector) that can have a real impact on policy making and implementation Because just as government must earn the trust of its citizens it must also share and return this trust in order to truly optimize the use of existing capacities.

They require:

- Effective knowledge management to elicit the best possible coordination between authorities, maximize resources, improve policy credibility, limit miscommunication, and ensure that partners in governance are able to contribute to the best of their ability for the welfare of society.

And last, but not least:

- Improving access to basic services because if people's basic needs are not being met, then all other objectives become unattainable.

Most of the presentations that we have planned for today involve cross cutting themes. Improving state capacity, strengthening access to services, fortifying accountability and transparency and effective decentralization each of these occur within a context of each other.

Here today, we have present nearly 70 participants from across the continent, representing governments and stakeholders from countries in North East, South, and South East Asia. I hope to learn from each of the presentations that will be made, and I also hope that each participant can establish positive contacts with others who are here, to learn from each other and establish beginnings that will enable the exchange of good practices and innovations in governance for long after the Forum is done.

Before ending, I would like to leave you with one last thought, which is the following:

Trust is a long term investment. In the present, the actions that build trust and improve governance sometimes seem minor, and the payback may not always be noticeable. It may also take the accumulation of many small actions and policies over a period of time before the effects can be perceived. So, sometimes this acts as a deterrent to the implementation of measures that build trust in our policies, our institutions, in the State, and between citizens because the benefits of greater trust are not always visible within the short term political cycle.

However, the government that can make the commitment to building trust, that can invest in the future, will be doing a great service for its country and people. It is therefore with great joy that I see that so many governments, public officials and governance stakeholders have made the effort to be here today.

"Kams Hamnid? Thank you