

## **ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC**

### **Second Meeting of the Kitakyushu Initiative Network (Mayors' Segment)**

**17 October 2003**

**Weihai, People's Republic of China**

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Director, Environment and Sustainable Development Division

Honourable Mayors, Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasures to welcome you all to the Mayors' segment of the Second Meeting of the Kitakyushu Initiative Network, being hosted by the City of Weihai. At the outset, I wish to express my profound appreciation to the Mayor and City of Weihai, Shandong Province, People's Republic of China for their warm hospitality and excellent arrangements made for the meeting which gives due prominence in particular to the city, the "leitmotif" of the Kitakyushu Initiative.

Cities and urban centres undoubtedly have always been the locus of the cultural, economic and political development of countries particularly in the Asian and Pacific region. It is not uncommon that cities and urban centres are the benchmarks of progress and development. Over the past thirty years, the expansion and growth of cities in the region have been one of the most remarkable phenomena in urban development. Many cities showcased their country's level of progress and economic prosperity through more impressive infrastructure, increased auxiliary services, and improvements in the telecommunication and transportation systems. All these developments have taken a frenetic phase that it also had a profound impact on the social and business cultures as well as the lifestyle of people in these centres.

The rapid changes in cities however, also brought new dimensions of social and environmental challenges. The unbridled expansion of urban centres have been the significant contributor of degradation of the region's physical environment as a result of unsustainable consumption and production patterns. The cities in the region are beset by growing problems of environmental deterioration relating to the loss of natural resources, lack of adequate shelter and dwelling provision, deteriorating ambient air and water quality conditions, an increasing backlog in urban service provision and inadequate environment related infrastructure. These conditions impact directly upon the residents of urban areas in particular the poor, and contribute to an acceleration in the deterioration of the urban environment. The most urgent actions required relate to the improvement of policies and the strengthening of overall management capabilities. It is in this context that I see the significance of this Meeting.

The challenges of urban growth were issues that were foremost to the fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific (MCED 2000) held in Kitakyushu, Japan 2000. The Conference noted that there was an urgent need to ameliorate the situation in most cities in the region which have reached critical proportions and was having deleterious effects on both human health, natural ecosystems and national economies of the region. It was opportune that the Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development 2000 was held in the City of Kitakyushu which is renowned not only for having successfully addressed the environmental problems that once plagued it but also for helping other cities in the region achieve similar results. This was the impetus for the Kitakyushu Initiative for a Clean Environment that was adopted at the Conference. The Initiative grew out of the experiences of Kitakyushu city, as well as other cities in the Asian and Pacific region, that had successfully overcome their own urban environmental problems and promoted a menu of effective actions that could be replicated in cities facing severe challenges in managing their own environments.

Since the Initiative's launching it has achieved considerable success in meeting its targets. The Network has been expanding rapidly and currently has 54 member cities representing 17 countries in the region. It has made substantial progress in capacity building by initiating and implementing pilot projects, supporting and monitoring ongoing intercity cooperation activities, organizing thematic seminars on critical urban environmental management issues, documenting

and analyzing successful practices, and disseminating relevant information through the network website. The cities active participation and the cooperation of the Government of Japan and the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES) have been crucial in these endeavours.

Honourable Mayors, ladies and gentlemen,

I consider this gathering significantly important in the light of the future of the Kitakyushu Initiative. Your meeting was preceded by a meeting of experts who reviewed the ongoing activities under the Kitakyushu Initiative Network, as well as identified some priority activities for the next phase. These will be presented to you for your consideration and further action. The importance of your deliberations needs no further emphasis as you will discuss the steps that need to be taken to further concretize the achievements so far gained by the Initiative and align them within the context of the commitments made at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, as reflected in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI). It is in this perspective that I call upon the Meeting to examine the most outstanding sustainable development issues confronting most cities in the region and try to find means that could help your governments realistically formulate a program of action that will expand the successes of the current initiatives.

This gathering of Mayors and Deputy Mayors in this meeting has a special purpose. We recognize the vital role you play as chief executives of cities. The power and authorities vested in you could be harnessed in transforming the cities you manage and oversee into habitable and healthy social, economic and political centres. You are all very well positioned to provide that kind of strategic leadership in meeting the challenges you encounter in making your cities achieve a healthy environment. Many among you have already shown the way through good governance, transparent and accountable decision-making, mobilizing your constituencies through multi sectoral partnerships and strengthening international collaboration with other cities and institutional organizations. These efforts need to be continued as needed, they are steps in the right direction.

For our part, UNESCAP wishes to affirm its commitment in continuing its support and contribution to the works of the Kitakyushu Initiative. We stand ready to help synergize efforts in all meaningful partnerships aimed to reduce poverty and the promotion of sustainable development in the region. The UNESCAP is determined to play its strategic and vital role of following up the activities of the Kitakyushu Initiative that include among others enhancing the exchange of information and experiences for policy making, assisting in the effective mobilization of financial resources, the dissemination of best practices, supporting capacity building efforts, enhancing technology transfer and culturing public-private and civil society partnerships at sub-regional and national levels.

The path to attaining a real sustainable development has been affirmed by the Johannesburg Summit. The challenge all of us face in the region is in seeing to it that the path elucidated by the WSSD is seriously and vigorously pursued. The partnership between cities forged by the Kitakyushu Initiative is an indication of our continuing commitment to the sustainable development process. I request every member of this forum to use this partnership as a springboard that will further advance the cause of sustainable development in the cities of the Asian and Pacific region.

Thank you for your kind attention.