

Opening Speech

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At this Sixth Northeast Asia Economic Forum, I am honored to meet many new people and old friends introduced to me last year in February at the 5th meeting of the Northeast Asia Economic Forum in Niigata. In that meeting, we adopted the Niigata statement in which we agreed to work for economic cooperation. And we have confirmed this sentiment again here in Honolulu. We are now searching for concrete steps to implement this idea.

The Cold War has ended and peace and cooperation are breaking out among Northeast Asian countries. And in keeping with this trend, we are working for the prosperity of this region. This region has ample labor, technology, and natural resources, but is also very diverse. We understand these changes and differences. What we have in mind is to work in the spirit of cooperation to develop this region. We believe that through exchanges and cooperation, mutual understanding will be enhanced and this in turn will bring prosperity to this area. Exchange has blossomed over the last few years around the Sea of Japan. Trade within the region has increased in general and in particular for Niigata prefecture. Niigata even has a techno-super liner operating in the Sea of Japan.

Last year in August, Japan had its first mission to Russia which I led. I worked with Russian Far East leaders. We discussed many projects including improvement of the port of Zarubino. This could be a very important port, so we have confirmed that we will undertake feasibility studies. In this context, we have technological problems which we must work out and we are working with the Japanese Ministry of Transportation to do so. We have a positive attitude and we would like to exchange suggestions and advice with Forum participants. Next month, we will have another meeting in Niigata and we will thus continue to expand on what we have discussed here in Honolulu.

In Niigata, we have ERINA (Economic Research Institute for Northeast Asia) which is undertaking research and providing information. A consulting office of ERINA will be created so that we can have active participation and exchange between these areas and the Northeast Asia Economic Forum.

Two leaders in this effort recently passed away—Touma Takeo and Tozaburo Sano. They were influential in starting this Forum in Niigata. I would like to continue to carry out their dream in Niigata and fulfill the promise of the prosperity of this area. I thus promise my full support in carrying out the Forum's activities.