Jeju Forum for Peace and Prosperity: 
New East Asia Regional Order and the Role of the UN

Keynote address by

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Distinguished speakers,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In 2015, at the East Asia Summit, Secretary-General noted that there was a “missing link” in regional cooperation in Northeast Asia.

He did so because this is the only sub-region in the world without a unique or dedicated political architecture.

This is why the idea of a new East Asia Regional Order is an important one – especially given the current political climate.

I want to express my appreciation to the Jeju Forum and the World Federation of United Nations Associations for putting this important topic on the agenda today.

I am encouraged by the growing number of existing initiatives and the political will that drives them.

These range from the Northeast Asian Economic Forum, to the trilateral process between the Republic of Korea, China and Japan, to the Northeast Asian Sub-regional Program for Environmental Cooperation.

Many of these initiatives are either narrowly focused or do not include the entire region. In short, they are neither comprehensive nor inclusive.

In moving forward, the aim must be not to reinvent the wheel, but to find a way to connect existing initiatives into a coordinated, comprehensive and consolidated framework. That framework must be inclusive, pragmatic and flexible.

I want to stress that any bottom up approach must be accompanied by a parallel top down push from the highest political levels. Unless the highest level of leadership shows interest, there will be no impetus for the policy mechanisms below them to take action. Political leaders must send a signal that they are invested in this process.

According to World Bank statistics, East Asia remains one of the main growth drivers of the world economy, accounting for nearly two-fifths of global economic growth. Overall, the region experienced growth of about 6.5 percent in 2015.

Northeast Asia is home to the world’s second, third and thirteenth largest economies. It accounts for around twenty percent of global GDP.

At the same time, in 2015, the combined military budgets of China, Japan and the Republic of Korea were over USD 220 billion.

It is critical that East Asia determines how to cooperate on the bigger security issues, boosting greater security dialogue.

Distinguished participants,
The need for an institutionalized security dialogue in Northeast Asia is higher than ever. In fostering such a dialogue, I want to emphasize the importance of two things:

First: Inclusivity. An effective architecture cannot exclude any regional country.

As Secretary-General has said, maintaining peace and security in Northeast Asia requires a commitment from all countries – not just China, Korea and Japan, but Mongolia, the United States and Russia, and also the DPRK. Even in the two meetings on the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative, NAPCI, DPRK’s seat remains empty.

Second: Practicality. We should first focus on issues of mutual concern or ‘softer’ security issues on which there is common ground.

This common ground can, in turn, build the confidence to address the ‘harder’, more long-term, issues.

The so-called ‘softer’ security issues are transnational security issues that affect the entire region, as well as the broader Asia-Pacific. They are complex and interconnected challenges that cannot be solved by one country.

This also links back to my point on inclusivity – the DPRK needs to be brought back to the negotiating table. Sanctions alone would not end the threat posed by the DPRK’s missile and nuclear programmes.

If we are to facilitate DPRK engagement in a regional mechanism, focusing on issues where there is a lower level of difference can create working relationships that will allow us to move on to the harder security issues, such as the nuclear program.

The objective should be to create positive patterns of interaction and ensure that geopolitical differences do not prevent cooperation in areas of common ground.

Soft issues may include drug control, health security, disaster management and energy security.

The need for cooperation on these issues goes beyond building relationships in the Northeast Asian sub-region. Each of these issues affects Northeast Asia, either directly or as part of broader Asia-Pacific-related challenges.

For example, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime recently highlighted East Asia, Southeast Asia and Oceania as the largest growing market for methamphetamines, with more than 13 million users of these drugs. This is a serious region-wide public health threat.

Consider also that 1.6 billion people in East Asia have been affected by natural disasters since 2000. The Asian region occupies 30% of the world's land mass, but 40% of the world's disasters occurred in the region in the past decade, resulting in a disproportionate 80% of the world's disaster deaths.

Thirdly, there is energy security. Northeast Asian States account for the world’s first, fifth and eighth largest consumers of energy.
China is the largest consumer of oil, Japan the largest consumer of natural gas and the Republic of Korea relies on imports to meet around 97% of its total primary energy consumption. Energy security is clearly a priority for the region.

As environmental and climate change necessities catalyze a shift to renewable and clean technology, there will be enormous scope for cooperation among countries of the region.

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Now I would like to turn to the possible role of the UN.

We, at the UN, can help in facilitating regional and sub-regional dialogue and cooperation.

Chapter VIII of the UN Charter actively encourages the creation of regional arrangements for the maintenance of international peace and security, consistent with the principles and purposes of the UN.

The UN can partner with regional institutions for the provision of technical and capacity-building expertise, donor support and mediation assistance.

For the last seventy years, we have learned from our partnerships with regional and sub-regional institutions all over the world – from ASEAN, to the African Union, to the League of Arab States, to the OSCE.

UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes are always available to support regional states, such as the WHO for health, UNDP for development and UNEP for environmental issues.

We do so because the problems we face today are global and interlinked. Solving them requires regional approaches.

Regional and sub-regional arrangements, as envisaged by the UN Charter, strengthen the United Nations’ ability to tackle global problems – including international peace and security.

There is no one-size-fits-all “blueprint” for developing regional architecture or order. Every region or sub-region is unique. Any institution-building must be based around those unique characteristics, but in line with the principles and purposes of the UN.

Distinguished participants,

The world is becoming increasingly complex and we face a range of emerging global security threats.

As High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, I believe the UN can assist Northeast Asian States tackling these security challenges.
I will raise three issues; 1) cyber security; 2) chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear or CBRN risks; and 3) terrorism, as well as the nexus between them.

To highlight these challenges, I will also give two numbers. First, there are approximately 841 million internet users in Northeast Asia, nearly one third of global internet users.

Second, Northeast Asia has the highest concentration of nuclear power plants in the world.

The cyber-attack in March 2015 on a nuclear power plant in the Republic of Korea demonstrates the clear nexus between cyber threats and nuclear security.

This speaks for itself why Northeast Asia should play a leading role in nuclear security and preventing nuclear terrorism.

In March this year, the planned terrorist attack of the nuclear power stations in Brussels and Paris bring home a second nexus between terrorism and nuclear security.

A lot of efforts have been made including through the Nuclear Security Summit, and UN Security Council Resolution 1540. But we have a long way to go.

Northeast Asia should examine urgently what needs to be done to tie these various efforts into a regional whole.

As Secretary-General said earlier today: the UN is prepared to provide whatever assistance is required to help East Asia thrive.

Please be assured that the UN will make available our seventy years of experience for the service of East Asia.

I thank you.