

Text of the Welcome Speech by President Ito Kenichi of JFIR at the Welcome Dinner for the participants of the 2nd meeting of the NEAT Working Group on “Overall Architecture of Community Building in East Asia,”

Tokyo, 24th April 2006

Prof. Yupha Klangsuwan, Dr. Stephen Leong and all other distinguished participants of the 2nd meeting of the NEAT Working Group on “Overall Architecture of Community Building in East Asia,”

I would like to welcome you all who represent the thirteen countries in East Asia. Those thirteen countries in the region have been working closely with each other to promote regional integration since 1997, when the ASEAN plus 3 Summit was first held in Kuala Lumpur. At the second APT Summit in Vietnam the East Asian Vision Group was organized and at the recommendation of the EAVG the Network of East Asian Think-tanks was established in Beijing in September 2003. In 2004, the following year, we had its second Annual Conference in Bangkok and adopted its Basic Rules and Framework. Last year we had its third Annual Conference in Tokyo and adopted its Policy Recommendations to be presented to the APT Summit which was held in Kuala Lumpur in December 2005.

What was important in this context was the fact that, as its activities grew and expanded, the NEAT agreed to organize Working Groups to better prepare itself for its Annual Conference. Last year in preparation for its third Annual Conference in Tokyo, the NEAT organized six Working Groups. In retrospect, I am confident that, without the achievements of those six Working Groups, it was impossible for the third NEAT Annual Conference in Tokyo to produce its Policy Recommendations. And this year in preparation for its fourth Annual Conference in Kuala Lumpur, the NEAT decided to organize seven Working Groups. That is the reason why we are here together this evening. We are here because we want to continue our efforts along this line of work plan of the NEAT. I am sure such efforts of ours will be rewarded by the contribution we will be able to make to the Policy Recommendations of the coming Annual Conference of NEAT in Kuala Lumpur this August.

The year 2006 seems to be an important year for the concept of an East Asian Community. Last December there was held the first meeting of the East Asia Summit in Kuala Lumpur. But little was agreed on the concrete contents of the concept of the East Asian Community either in the APT Summit or in the EAS. That means that those questions still remain questions and we need to tackle them in the year 2006. The Working Group which will meet tomorrow wants to contribute to the strengthening of our efforts in that direction. More specifically, the Working Group will tackle the question of "Regional Architectures for Non-Traditional Security and Environmental Cooperation in East Asia." I am confident that this will be a successful meeting and will contribute greatly to the success of not only of the NEAT Annual Conference in August but of both the APT Summit and the East Asia Summit in December. Thank you very much.