

Text of the Welcome Speech by President ITO Kenichi of JFIR at the Welcome Dinner for the participants of the 3rd meeting of the NEAT Working Group on “Overall Architecture of Community Building in East Asia: Promoting Regional Cooperation for Non-Traditional Security Issues”

Tokyo, 13 June 2007

Such old friends of mine as Prof. Morada, Prof. SU, Dr. KELIAT as well as my new friends from ASEAN, China and Korea, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this dinner for the third time. 4 years have passed since NEAT, the Network of East Asian Think-tanks, was established in Beijing in 2003. 3 years have passed since we met in Bangkok and decided to introduce the mechanism of Working Groups to facilitate the process of policy recommendation making in NEAT. The NEAT Annual Conferences which met in Tokyo and Kuala Lumpur in 2005 and 2006 benefited greatly from the work of the Working Groups. And the Policy Recommendations adopted by both Annual Conferences were presented to the APT Summit meetings which took place in Kuala Lumpur and Cebu respectively in 2005 and 2007.

This year in preparation for its fifth Annual Conference in Singapore, the NEAT has organized six Working Groups. And one of them is the NEAT Working Group on “Overall Architecture of Community Building in East Asia: Promoting Regional Cooperation for Non-Traditional Security Issues.” 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 the efforts of the Working Group will be rewarded by the contribution it would make to the Policy Recommendations of the coming Annual Conference of NEAT in Singapore this August.

The year 2007 seems to be more promising than ever for the community building in East Asia. Against the background of the exchange of visits by Prime Ministers Abe Shinzo and Wen Jiabao between Japan and China, the concept of “mutually beneficial strategic relationship” was agreed between the two countries. For the past years we have heard from our ASEAN friends that they are worried about the absence of summit meetings between the two giants in East Asia. But don’t worry any more. I am sure that the leaders of the two countries have learned enough from the past experience.

The Working Group which will meet tomorrow is a small step forward intended to contribute to the strengthening of the community building in East Asia. More specifically, the Working Group will tackle the question of “Overall Architecture of Community Building in East Asia: Promoting Regional Cooperation for Non-Traditional Security Issues.” I am confident that under the leadership of Prof. SHIRAIISHI this will be a successful Working Group and will contribute greatly to the success 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.