

NEAT WG Welcome Dinner Speech by ITO Kenichi on 6 July 2011 at Tokyo Club

Prof. OKAZAKI, Director of the NEAT Working Group on “Regional Cooperation on Disaster Management,” Prof. John WONG, my old friend from Singapore, and all other distinguished members of the NEAT Working Group on “Regional Cooperation on Disaster Management,” Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to welcome you all to the NEAT Working Group meeting to be held all day tomorrow and to the Emergency Dialogue “The Great East Japan Earthquake and Regional Cooperation on Disaster Management” to be held in the afternoon of the day after tomorrow.

As we remember, it was in the year 2004 that the giant earthquake of magnitude 9.3 with an epicenter off the southwest coast of Sumatra in the Indian Ocean took place. And then it was in the same year of 2008 that Myanmar was hit by a great cyclone flood and China by a great earthquake in Sichuan province. And then on 11 March this year Japan was hit by a catastrophic earthquake of magnitude 9.0 which struck off the coast of Eastern Japan. The occurrence of great disasters has brought about a colossal number of victims in each of all those disasters. Will East Asia, an eminent disaster-prone area, continue to be a victim of earthquakes and floods? Will we remain abandoned in the face of natural disasters? Or, shall we stand up and get united against those threats? We all hope that people’s survival, dignity, livelihood, and development profits will not be gravely affected by disasters. All East Asian countries must now pursue and achieve a further progress in the regional cooperation to reduce the impacts of disasters in the future.

The NEAT Working Group meeting tomorrow, for which we are gathering here today, will discuss detailed and specialized measures for “Regional Cooperation on Disaster Management in East Asia.” In so doing, we will develop concrete and feasible policy recommendations to be submitted to the ASEAN plus Three Summit. We are fully aware that no country can achieve this task alone as it requires a multifaceted and concerted approach to develop regional cooperation on disaster management. In this context, the Working Group meeting tomorrow will be a small but an important step forward towards the development of regional cooperation on disaster management in East Asia. I am confident that this Working Group under the leadership of Prof. OKAZAKI will be a successful Working Group and will add much to the success not only of the NEAT Annual Conference in August in Danang, but of both the ASEAN Plus Three Summit and the East Asia Summit.

Now, Ladies and Gentleman, I would like to propose a toast. To the success of the Working Group meeting tomorrow! Cheers! Thank you very much.