
New Multilateralism in East Asia: Building on Common Interests, Expanding on Common Ground

BAN Ki-moon
Secretary-General, UN

I am delighted to visit this beautiful Jeju Island and to be among so many good friends of the United Nations. It is a special pleasure to join you—senior government officials, business leaders, eminent scholars—in the Jeju Peace Forum. A decade ago, as Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, I had a modest role in launching this distinguished program. Later, as Foreign Minister, I had the honor of helping create the Jeju Peace Institute. Over the years, the Jeju Peace Forum has made itself a force for understanding and cooperation in Asia and around the world. Through your leadership, you are helping fulfill our vision of a truly global Korea, a bridge to the region and beyond. And I am pleased to see you continuing to reach out and expand your partnerships, including with so many of us at the UN. Your foundation is dialogue—the key to peace and progress in our modern world.

We meet at a moment of profound change and challenge. We confront global crises, the likes of which we have not seen

in generations, all hitting at once—food, fuel, flu, finance. These compound other, even greater challenges. I speak, here, of climate change. As Secretary-General, I often hear the lament: “If only we had more money!” And yet, the biggest challenge we face is not a deficit of resources. No, the biggest deficit is will—political will. Leaders must summon the political will this critical moment requires.

Our era demands this above all else. It demands a new spirit of committed multilateralism—a multilateralism suited to the challenges of the 21st century. A new multilateralism focused on results. A new multilateralism that brings real change into people’s lives. Success will depend on working together, recognizing our interdependence and shared interests. It will depend on using the institutions we have built to encourage collective action—the United Nations, above all. There is no doubt that Asia is vital in shaping this new world. The rise and dynamism of Asia is one of the defining stories of our time. It has reshaped global politics and transformed our economic landscape. It has lifted billions of people out of poverty. Amid a global recession, it is an engine of growth and our best hope for pulling the world out of an economic ditch. But for Asia to fully realize its tremendous economic and political potential—for Asia to take its rightful place on the global stage—it must build strength from within. There is strength in burden-sharing. There is opportunity in building common markets and infrastructure. There is uncommon influence in common cause. Of course, we all know the difficulties. They include ideological differences and delicate historical legacies. Unresolved territorial and political disputes. Diversity of political orientations and disparities in economic development. And yet, we also recognize that we are part of a very special Asian family, a community drawing strength from a common history, values and traditions. This is a foundation to build on.

We must leverage this tremendous strength for the global good. This is not just a matter of providing resources. It is about Asia’s vital and growing energy, its dynamism, its impressive ability to generate ideas and innovation. It is about Asia’s growing ability to shape the world, to change it—and in doing so to benefit all. Around the

world, we see experiments in regional integration. Europe has proved that integration is an engine of prosperity and social advancement. Africans have created the African Union to build collective strength and manage problems of common concern. Latin Americans and North Americans are working to create a free-trade zone. Here in this neighborhood, our perspective should expand in step with our economic and social advancement. I would offer three specific pillars on which to build a new multilateralism in East Asia, such that the nations of the region come together as partners rather than competitors.

First, the security pillar. A few days ago, we marked the anniversary of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Today, the world is at another turning point. The assumption that nuclear weapons are indispensable for security is crumbling. Disarmament is back on the global agenda—and not a moment too soon. What an opportunity lies before us! The presidents of the United States and the Russian Federation have joined in seeking to reduce their arsenals. The Conference on Disarmament has made a breakthrough. For the first time in decades, negotiators have agreed to a package of measures to move the world away from nuclear weapons. Now is our moment—our opportunity to build on this momentum. And we have a campaign. We call it WMD, not weapons of mass destruction, but “We Must Disarm.” Asia must be a full partner. Few regions have a greater stake in halting nuclear proliferation. The new multilateralism—Asia’s moment—obliges you to engage fully in this great common cause.

Asia should do more. I strongly welcome the current trend toward more forward-looking relations and stronger cooperation on matters of regional peace and security. I welcome the trend toward greater democracy. In Southeast Asia, ASEAN is a welcome presence. The ASEAN Regional Forum provides a broad framework for an annual exchange of views on security. I urge you to continue along this path, with an emphasis on mutual trust, confidence building and preventive diplomacy. This is bottom-up diplomacy, beginning with issues on which we have consensus. By contrast, the six-party

talks on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula are designed to tackle the most difficult, most controversial security issues—issues of truly global implications—the nuclear issue of the DPRK. The process has not been easy, nor will it grow easier. As I have repeatedly stated, as Secretary-General of the United Nations, I am deeply concerned about the current situation on the Korean Peninsula.

The stakes are high, not just for the Korean Peninsula, but also for the entire region of Asia and even beyond. Clearly, we must work together and work creatively to put the talks back on track. If successful, the six-party process could pave the way toward a broader multilateral security framework in Northeast Asia. As Secretary-General of the United Nations, I stand ready to help this process move on.

Second, the economic pillar. Asia has emerged as a principal player in the global economy. Its role at the recent G20 and G8 summits testify to this fundamental fact. At the April G20 gathering in London, we asked for \$1 trillion to make sure the most vulnerable peoples of the world were not left behind. Asia needs to take an increasingly responsible role as an emerging donor. At the Pittsburg G20 meeting, I will urge the leaders to implement their pledges. We are at the mid-point of the Millennium Development Goals, as you well know. We need to drive hard, starting now, to hit the target by 2015. That means a renewed commitment to multilateralism—a concrete, committed multilateralism that puts a premium on action, on results rather than rhetoric—real action for real people. At the next G20 meeting in Pittsburg on September 24, I will again call on world leaders to deliver on their promises. This, too, demands Asia's engagement. This, too, requires Asia to take on new responsibilities in line with its newfound place in the world. I welcome other steps that Asia is taking. Among them is the idea of creating an Asian Monetary Fund. An AMF could complement the IMF in helping countries respond to financial and economic shocks. It could promote investment in regional transport infrastructure and social protection. I know that, for the moment, your energies are focused on the Chiang

Mai Initiative. I welcome these discussions on how to put the region's ample foreign reserves to the best possible use. I also welcome the fact that the countries of the region are trading more and more with one another. Clearly, Asian countries will benefit as greater interaction increasingly drives growth. A new multilateralism—an Asian multilateralism—recognizes this reinforcing power. It is a political and economic multiplier effect. It is the reality of geopolitical arithmetic. With cooperation, integration and unity, one plus one equals more than two.

Third, the environmental pillar. We know that climate change respects no borders. We must deal with it together with greater emphasis and urgency, and the time is now. Four months from now, in December, world leaders will gather in Copenhagen. We have a once-in-a-generation chance to seal a deal that all nations can embrace.

The reality before us is simple. It is the reality of the new multilateralism: without Asian leadership, without Asian political will, there will be no deal in Copenhagen. This would be a tragedy for all humanity. Copenhagen provides an opportunity to reach a fair, effective and scientifically ambitious agreement—an agreement that can benefit all nations and advance our common goal of a greener and cleaner future. That is why I will hold a climate change summit of world leaders on September 22. We expect more than 100 heads of state and government—by far the largest such gathering ever—the first and maybe the last summit before we make a deal. This as much as anything underscores the importance of this moment. It underscores the importance of a new multilateralism—a multilateralism capable of delivering what is demanded of us.

While we are talking about the challenge of climate change, let me note a related bit of news. As you well know, the Asia Pacific region is among the regions of the world most vulnerable to natural disasters. In recent days, Typhoon Morakot has left as many as nine million people homeless in China and Taiwan. We have seen earthquakes and tropical storms in Japan and the Indian Ocean. That

is why, earlier this week, the UN opened a new office dedicated to disaster risk reduction, particularly as it relates to climate change. I have seen for myself how big a difference disaster risk reduction can make. For Asia, this is a new multilateral imperative. China, Japan and the Republic of Korea, in particular, have the skills, technologies and financial resources to help the region reduce disaster risk. Indeed, I expect great things of my fellow Koreans. This country has come into its own in a remarkable way. It is a robust democracy. It has gone from being a recipient of foreign aid to a provider of overseas development assistance. In many ways, it is a model for others still in transition to democracy and an advanced economy. When I was running for this job, one of the strongest arguments I made was the role Korea can play in connecting developed and developing countries. All of us should be proud of that achievement and many others. But as we have said, with that transformation comes greater responsibility. In development, that should mean more generous official development assistance. In diplomacy, that should mean greater engagement across the regional and international agenda. In this regard, I highly commend President Lee Myung Bak for his “New Asia Policy” and his vision of a “Global Korea.” As Secretary-General of the United Nations, I too would like to see my country become a bridge—a bridge between East and West, a bridge between North and South.

In conclusion, let me speak bluntly. This is Asia’s moment. This is our new multilateral moment. As Secretary-General, I also see the United Nations as ever more engaged and ever more important to your future. We can help Asia realize its full potential—in all three pillars of security, economics and environment, and more importantly, in human rights. We can help Asia to take its place on the global stage. As an honest broker, the United Nations can facilitate delicate diplomatic negotiations—the first step toward resolving tensions, ancient and modern. As the great global convener, the United Nations can help civic movements, such as the Jeju Peace Forum and Jeju Peace Institute, to emerge as full global partners. We can help you

become a force to pull the region together.

Asia's future lies in integration, in closer union. We can work together to educate and shape the leaders of tomorrow even as we help the leaders of today speak with a genuinely global voice. Look to the United Nations as your partner in gaining strength and influence in the world. And in doing so, I ask you to share the UN's role—and its duty. To make the world a better place—with even greater justice, peace and prosperity for all. This is truly an Asian opportunity. It is also an obligation for Asia, a responsibility for all.