

**Opening Statement by  
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**at  
The Mayors' Asia-Pacific Environmental Summit**

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**Introduction**

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is pleased to be a collaborating partner of this Mayors' Asia-Pacific Environmental Summit. This meeting provides an excellent opportunity for us to share experiences and insights on urban environment and poverty issues, and explore potential areas of collaboration. Given the diversity of the different institutions and cities represented here today, there is much to learn from each other's experiences.

I would like to express our gratitude to the Government and the people of Honolulu for their warm welcome and hospitality. My special thanks goes to the Honorable Jeremy Harris, Mayor of the City and County of Honolulu and his staff, and all other people concerned, for their efforts to make this gathering all the more meaningful.

**Past, Present, and Future Situation of the Region**

Today, nearly 30 percent of Asians have no access to safe drinking water, and nearly 70 percent of Asians have no access to sanitation. Approximately two-thirds of the world's poor live in the Asia and Pacific region. The increased migration of Asia's population from rural to urban areas is a major cause of environmental problems in cities across the region. This rapid in-migration results in a growing number of slums, puts pressure on already inadequate water supply and sanitation systems, and generates even more air pollution. Air and water pollution are the genesis of many diseases and illnesses that lead to the premature deaths of millions of people and children living in developing country cities in Asia and the Pacific.

Air pollution in Asia threatens both people's health and economic activity. According to the World Health Organization, 12 of the 15 cities with the highest levels of particulate matter, and 6 of the 15 cities with the highest levels of sulfur dioxide, are located in Asia. The economic impact of air pollution is most directly evident from a lost

productivity due to sickness resulting from respiratory illnesses and disease. High levels of lead particulates also account for learning disabilities among children.

Much of the human waste in many Asian cities is not collected or treated adequately, which means that entire communities are susceptible to continuing serious epidemics. Industrial wastewater is also a major source of pollution in some residential zones, particularly areas inhabited by the poor. Solid waste management is also woefully inadequate across the region's cities.

Ladies and gentlemen, the environmental predicament facing the Asia and Pacific region is most likely to get worse. By 2020, Asia will become predominantly urbanized with 54 percent of the total population living in urban areas. According to the Cities Data Book, ADB's new publication being launched at this Summit, by 2015 the number of megacities (those of more than 10 million inhabitants) in Asia will increase to 17 from today's figure of nine. By 2025, Dhaka and Karachi will have each added 10 million people requiring additional housing, jobs, water supply and so on. Jakarta, Kolkata, Delhi, Bangkok and Manila will have each added at least 5 million to their rolls. Financing the development and environmental management of these cities represents one of the most difficult challenges to meeting the goal of sustainable development in Asia in the new millennium.

### **Summit Theme**

Within the past several years, a number of groups and organizations have sponsored conferences and workshops on the environmental challenges facing the urbanized areas within the Asia and Pacific region. However, this Summit is the first major international conference which focuses on the possible policy and programmatic links between urban environmental issues and social equity or poverty reduction initiatives. This Summit is an excellent opportunity for achieving a clear understanding of the relationship between urban poverty and environment challenges as well as solutions. The case studies for the cities of Wuhan in the People's Republic of China, Hyderabad in India, Phuket in Thailand, and Ebeye in the Marshall Islands suggest that more attention needs to be paid to addressing the inter-relationships among urban poverty, public health and the urban environment. The case studies also address specific programs that could possibly be replicated by other cities in the region. Improving the quality and quantity of environmental infrastructure and services delivery includes supporting legal, institutional, financial, and social frameworks to provide greater accountability, participation, predictability, and transparency.

### **The ADB's Responses**

ADB's assistance, through integrated packages of capacity building, investment loans, and policy dialogue will increasingly address the critical issues of sustainable development. ADB will also help the developing economies in the region to conserve the ecological base of urban and rural livelihoods, and enhance their social development.

ADB support for urban environmental improvement will focus on three priority areas: (i) improving urban waste management; (ii) upgrading slum communities; and (iii) strengthening municipal management capabilities.

For example, in 2000, ADB approved the Calcutta Environmental Improvement Project, which aims to improve the welfare and well being of the people of Kolkata, especially the poor, through improved sewerage and drainage, solid waste management, slum improvements, and canal rehabilitation. A stakeholder consultative process, woven into every aspect of the project will, ensure that the design is responsive to and helps empower the communities. This process also provides the communities with the confidence to participate in environmental decisions that affect their communities.

Also approved last year was the Pasig River Environmental Management and Rehabilitation Sector Development Program, which will reduce exposure to urban wastes and related health risks to numerous low-income Filipino communities located along the Pasig River. The investments in this project include establishing environmental preservation areas and infrastructure improvements. In addition, the project will institutionalize the necessary policy reforms and enhance public awareness of environmental issues.

Examples of other ADB-financed urban environmental improvement projects can be found in Shanxi Province, PRC; Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam; and Karnataka, India. All of these projects seek improvements through policy reforms, public sector investments, and strengthening the capacity of agencies with environmental management responsibilities.

## **Conclusion**

Ladies and gentlemen,

This Summit provides a timely opportunity to discuss the state of the Asian urban environment, and the steps toward meeting the challenge of sustainable development in Asian and Pacific cities. We are especially interested in learning of your experiences, which can contribute to the development of effective and affordable approaches for protecting and improving urban environments in Asia, while improving public health and reducing poverty in the region.

We wish you great success in your deliberations and I look forward to learning of your recommendations.

Thank you.