



SWEDEN

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It is a true pleasure to address the annual meeting of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) this year—the year of the Black Horse—in Shanghai. I wish to thank our hosts for their gracious hospitality. It is an auspicious time: “Horse arrives, success comes” says a Chinese traditional expression. The horse is a symbol of power and success—two concepts to be applied to our joint efforts to reduce poverty.

Asia still hosts almost two thirds of the world’s poor. Tremendous results in reducing poverty have been achieved in the region. But to reach the Millennium Development Goals efforts need to be stepped up, especially in South Asia. Success depends on our focused and concerted efforts, based on a genuine political commitment in countries and organizations alike. Sound policies and methods are means to this end. It is a matter of integrating those who feel marginalized and excluded. It is a matter of bridging the chasm between the rich and poor, between the included and the excluded, between those with opportunities, options, and power—and those without.

ADB, better than any other organization in Asia, has a comparative advantage and resources to assist in increasing opportunities, providing options, and empowering poor individuals to improve their own lives. ADB should use its extensive links in the region and its deep understanding of Asian cultures to ensure that the bridge is constructed in accordance with local values and traditions.

Poor and rich countries alike have committed themselves to poverty reduction. A successful implementation of pro-poor policies requires an increase in the official development assistance allocation to Asia.

For ADB, the resources must be better matched with the tasks ahead:

- (i) We are still waiting for ADB 's analysis of the resource situation and Sweden is prepared to take our responsibility as a shareholder in this respect.
- (ii) We must make sure that ADB has the right mix of lending instruments to reach the poor in both low and middle-income countries.

- (iii) We must find a sustainable way to finance, on concessional terms, an adequate level of technical assistance (TA) resources and regional public goods, such as promoting good environment and combating HIV/AIDS.

My Government strongly supports ADB in these tasks. Today, ADB is well equipped. I wish to commend President Chino for his outstanding job in establishing poverty reduction as the overarching goal and reorganizing ADB to better mirror the poverty agenda.

But, why does this forward-looking organization backtrack on one prerequisite for success? Namely, professional women in leading positions. Their number, already alarmingly low, has decreased. This is both old-fashioned and counterproductive. The problem is not Asia—a region endowed with strong, professional, and powerful women, including some in the highest offices in their countries. The main problems are within ADB itself.

Set targets. (i) Improve recruitment procedures. (ii) Implement policies that make ADB an attractive working environment for professional women at the highest level, and let all staff enjoy the benefit of a truly equal and equitable organization.

Effective solutions to regional problems must be sought at the regional level. I see regional cooperation as one of the strongest comparative advantages of this institution. I am pleased to see that ADB is focusing on this issue. Asia needs the support of ADB to strengthen its regional institutions, to promote policy dialogue, and to address common concerns that transcend national borders. The positive experiences from ADB engagement in initiatives such as the Greater Mekong Subregion to promote peace, stability, and development should be taken further. ADB must take a leading role in the promotion of Asia as the world's third economic power.

Multilateral cooperation was pursued actively last year. In Afghanistan, ADB has been very open in inviting bilateral donors to take part in field missions. The ongoing decentralization of ADB is another promising sign, confirmed by our embassies in the region. Delegation of resources, authority, and power from ADB headquarters to the field has led to improved aid coordination and valuable support to developing member countries for their national poverty reduction strategies. However, there is room for further improvement. We encourage ADB to step up the decentralization process and coordinate even closer with partners.

The Chinese saying “Horse arrives success comes” holds a promise. For ADB this entails a successful implementation of the poverty agenda.