

MYANMAR

HLA THEIN SWE, Governor Ad Interim

It is a great pleasure and honor for me to be here, representing Myanmar, and to have the chance to address this auspicious occasion. We are very pleased that Spain is hosting this event for the very first time in this very beautiful and scenic city of Madrid.

Allow me to join the previous speakers and express, on behalf of the Myanmar delegation, our deep and sincere appreciation to the people and Government of Spain for hosting this 41st Annual Meeting of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), for extending a warm welcome and hospitality to us since our arrival, and for making us feel as though as if we were at home. I would also like to thank the management and staff of ADB for making excellent arrangements for the success of this meeting.

I would also like to congratulate the chairman. Mr. Chairman, with your wide experience and under your guidance, I am certain that the meeting will be a very fruitful and successful one.

Unlike last year, we are here today under quite different circumstances. The world economy is slowing down, oil and food prices are rising, sociopolitical tensions are still rising, and outbreaks of contagious diseases and natural disasters are continuing to occur. However, it is heartening to know that most of the countries in our region have remained resilient to outside disturbances. Nevertheless, we should not be complacent, as there remain risks and challenges that need to be overcome. We need to collaborate and cooperate more in order to mitigate the effects of those disturbances while at the same time contributing to the continuous growth of our region.

May I now highlight some elements of the economic development of Myanmar. Short-term economic plans have been formulated and implemented since 1992–1993. 2007–2008, which just ended in March, was the second year of the fourth short-term plan and the targeted growth has been achieved due to balanced growth in all sectors of the economy.

Agriculture, with a share of more than 30% of GDP, remains the mainstay of the economy. However, as Myanmar intends to industrialize the country, industrial zones have been established. Plans are also underway for the establishment of special economic zones and relevant laws, rules, and regulations are in the drafting stage.

The share of expenditure for the agriculture and industrial sectors has been on the rise for the past 6 years. However, as the main goal of the country is to reduce poverty and uplift the living standards of the population, expenditures on the social sectors and border area development are also increasing year by year.

In the education sector, the total number of high schools in 2007 has increased by 190% compared with 1988. Likewise, the number of middle schools has increased by 53.8%, the number of teachers by 49.3% and the total number of students by 49.6%. In the border areas, new schools have opened and they are attended by many students. At the same time, the quality of teachers has also been upgraded.

Expenditure on the health sector has also been increasing and the necessary steps have been taken for health sector development. Therefore, malnutrition of children under 5 years is not specific in Myanmar. The malaria morbidity rate has been declining. The National Tuberculosis Programme has been implemented since 1994 and, as a result, the case detection rate and the treatment success rate have also increased. The National AIDS Programme has been launched and concerted efforts have been made in collaboration with UN agencies, international nongovernment organizations (NGOs), and regional organizations.

The poverty gap, which is an indicator measuring poverty, is also minimal. Therefore, it can be said that, due to our efforts, we have been able to attain most of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). We intend to make more efforts in order to fulfill all the MDGs on time.

We have a stable and sound banking system in place, with the banks in compliance with internationally accepted standards and norms. Due diligence and efforts have been made to prevent money laundering and financing of terrorism through our financial system. Our external position is favorable and it has been in surplus for more than 5 years resulting in an increase in gross foreign reserves. Only inflation remains an obstacle as it is rising. The increase in inflation may be partly attributable to the budget deficit. In the absence of external financial assistance for more than two decades, we have had to rely mainly on our own resources for the necessary infrastructure development expenditure, so the public sector budget has been in deficit for some time. However, plans are underway to balance the budget in the next few years.

At this point, I should mention that Myanmar is still a transitional economy and is not yet a full market economic system or fully integrated into the global economy. The achievements thus far have been attained by relying mainly on our own resources with little assistance from outside. Our country's efforts, if supported internationally, would have been more robust and successful. With or without international assistance, we intend to strive harder in order to maintain the growth momentum that we have achieved not only for the benefit of our country but also for the benefit of the whole region.

The achievements that we have made thus far have been commendable. However, some risks and challenges still remain, such as the prospect of a continued global slowdown, a rise in oil and commodity (especially food) prices, the economic sanctions imposed by some advanced countries, and the absence of international assistance for more than two decades.

As have been stated, Myanmar is not yet fully integrated into the global economy, so the recent global slowdown may have only a limited impact. Myanmar has been lucky as it has a sufficient food supply. Our priority is domestic sufficiency and only the surplus will be exported. We have ample supply of food for our nationals and we have even been able to assist some neighboring countries that have faced natural disasters and difficulties. Therefore, our main problem remains the economic sanctions imposed on us, which are wholly politically motivated and without any viable economic reason. We would like to state that sanctions are not beneficial, either to the countries that impose them or to the countries that have sanctions imposed on them. We therefore call for the abolition of the sanctions.

We are also a legitimate member of international organizations, such as ADB, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, all of which have refrained from giving any financial assistance to us for quite a long time. We would like to use this opportunity to call for these institutions to resume normal relations with Myanmar. Whatever the outcome, Myanmar remains committed to fully cooperating with these institutions in order to promote domestic, regional and global growth.

Myanmar intends to take all necessary actions to maintain its growth momentum while overcoming any obstacles that it may encounter on its way to development. We are certain that our efforts will assist not only the prosperity of our country, but will also benefit our region and consequently will contribute to global growth.