

**3rd Ministerial Conference
Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation
1 November 2004
Astana, Kazakhstan**

Introductory Remarks

Joseph B. Eichenberger

**Vice President, Operations 2
Asian Development Bank**

Your Excellency Prime Minister Akhmetov,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates, Colleagues
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am honored to have the opportunity to serve this important assembly as Co-Chairperson, representing the Asian Development Bank and our institutional partners in regional cooperation, namely, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the International Monetary Fund, the Islamic Development Bank, the United Nations Development Programme, and the World Bank.

I speak for this entire distinguished group, I'm sure, in expressing deep appreciation to the Government and people of Kazakhstan for the fine arrangements they have provided us. Your Excellency Prime Minister Akhmetov, the warm hospitality you have extended contributed greatly to the open, cooperative, and friendly atmosphere that has characterized our very fruitful discussions thus far.

Distinguished delegates, we have two principal agenda items for today's Conference: your consideration of the Report of the Senior Officials; and your review and adoption of the Joint Ministerial Statement. Both documents reflect, and I believe capture, the very substantive work and the progress that has been made since our last meeting in Tashkent. More importantly, we are looking to you for guidance and direction regarding priorities and next steps.

Strong ownership and active engagement by the Governments represented here today is vital to the success of this CAREC initiative and to the cause of regional cooperation more broadly. The multilateral institutions are all deeply committed to doing what we can to promote and facilitate regional cooperation. But our effectiveness depends largely on building on your efforts. Regional cooperation must be driven by demand, rather than supply. As President Chino said, it is very much in your hands.

Distinguished delegates, our preparatory work for this Conference has identified a number of specific steps to strengthen CAREC and to provide further stimulus to the pace of regional integration. We believe that if successfully implemented, these steps will contribute to the more rapid progress that we all seek. Over the past year, good progress has been made in several areas fundamental to trade and business enterprise. But much more can and needs to be done in these and other areas. I encourage you to intensify your efforts to identify and implement initiatives of mutual benefit – initiatives that will generate new employment and income opportunities throughout Central Asia.

We all know that regional cooperation is a means to an end, not an end in itself. It is an essential building block to construct more competitive economies, drawing more fully on the abundant human and physical resources that exist here. Regional cooperation is an imperative for nations with relatively small populations scattered over large areas. It is doubly important for land-locked nations.

Looking ahead, we have agreed that the emphasis needs to be on results. We must, and I believe we can, demonstrate more clearly the win-win results of regional cooperation. It is clearly not a zero-sum game, where gains to one partner must mean losses to the other. It rests, rather on a foundation of mutual benefit that has proven its effectiveness the world over. This process needs to show better how the region's economic interests are shared, and to identify specifically where and how each country's prospects can be improved through collaboration and commerce, rather than "going it alone." For CAREC specifically, we have discussed and largely agreed to a number of concrete steps to sharpen our focus on observable results and core priorities. We very much hope that these proposals will enjoy your support and commitment.

In particular, I encourage you to think “outside the box” of the CAREC Program. We can both widen and deepen the Program while maintaining its pragmatic, results-based focus. We can build further on the excellent cooperation among the multilateral institutions that we have already achieved. We need to reflect on how best to coordinate the CAREC Program with other regional cooperation programs, including the Central Asia Cooperation Organization, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the Eurasian Economic Community. And we need to craft a well-specified action plan that engages each of us fully, sets performance targets, and captures the core issues that ultimately will drive regional integration.

Distinguished delegates, today’s agenda invites all of us to reflect carefully and act pragmatically on a set of urgent challenges for which there are no easy answers. But we do so with the benefit of insights gained from the collaborative work we have done so far, and with the benefit of the experience observed elsewhere.

We have come a long way in just 3 short years. And I am confident that our deliberations here in Astana will position us to travel further down the road of peace, cooperation, and mutual prosperity.

Let us now hear the opening remarks of the Country Delegations.

Thank you.