

Opening Remarks
by
Joseph B. Eichenberger
Vice President, Operations 2, Asian Development Bank

**Second Ministerial Conference on
Central Asia Economic Cooperation**

12 November 2003, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Mr. Azimov, distinguished participants. Let me join others in expressing on behalf of ADB our sincere thanks to the Government and the people of Uzbekistan for hosting this important event, and to all of you for your presence and your contributions.

This gathering reflects our shared aspirations for a more prosperous, integrated, and economically vigorous Central Asia. It reflects our conviction that a freer and fuller exchange of goods and services—both within the region and beyond—is a necessary precondition to achieve those high aspirations. It reflects our judgment that now is a time both of great promise and of great challenge in delivering on those convictions. And it reflects our view that the international financial institutions can be of real and unique assistance in turning today's challenges into better lives for all of the people of Central Asia.

We can, and we should, take a measure of satisfaction from the progress we have made to date. Some significant new regional projects are underway in the priority areas of energy, transport, and trade facilitation. Important analytical work has helped us all to better understand the challenges, and to think both creatively and pragmatically about cooperative ways forward. Important and sensitive issues are on the table, and differing perspectives are being aired constructively. We have, together, created a strong foundation on which to build further, and for this all of you deserve both credit and our thanks.

In his address this morning ADB President Chino covered the key issues both eloquently and comprehensively, and I have but little to add. So let me take just a

few moments to identify a few areas where our future efforts might most usefully be focused.

First, we need to continue to work cooperatively to design and finance specific projects that produce tangible cross-border results and win-win outcomes. Strong commitment on the part of individual governments will remain essential going forward.

Second, we need further to deepen coordination among the donor-side partners. The working group of the five multilateral institutions has made valuable contributions, and we are looking to you for ideas and suggestions for further improvements. In particular, each of the institutions can draw from a rich pool of experience with the special challenges of both transition economies and regional integration.

Third, political developments beyond the immediate region have created major new opportunities that effectively did not exist when this effort first got underway. There is a new North-South dimension to trade and commercial integration that is rich in promise, and we would all be well served to find creative ways to bring these new possibilities into sharper focus. The participation here today of senior representatives from numerous countries outside the immediate region is testimony to the high level of interest and possibility.

Fourth, over the medium- and longer-term, the active engagement of the private sector will increasingly drive and sustain the deeper integration of Central Asia that we all desire, both internally and with the rest of the world. Our work—with respect to both specific prospects and larger institutional issues—can surely make an enduring contribution in this critical area. It is important that we remain actively alert to, and embrace, the possibilities that lie before us.

Fifth, and finally, while the benefit of integration and openness is one of the most compelling lessons of economics, the case is never self-evident. The case needs to be made, clearly and repeatedly, at the political level and to the wider public. Our work would benefit greatly by producing quantified estimates of the

benefits of greater integration and the costs that result from its absence. This is a relatively unexplored area where the international institutions could bring some real expertise and value-added.

In the end, the measure of good public policy is often the extent to which it focuses pragmatically on the tasks at hand while also looking out toward and beyond the horizon. This effort is a vehicle for us to do just that. The road is never as clear or as smooth as any of us would like. But it is surely a road worth traveling, and it is a road that can only be traveled together. I very much hope that when we conclude today, more of that road will be behind us and the horizon will be some way closer.

Thank you.