

Opening address

ICAO-NCC Joint Seminar / Mar. 24, 2009 (Tuesday)

Mr. Alfred Domagalski, President of the Board of the National Cooperative Council, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Mr. Marek Sawicki, Dr. Hagen Henry of International Labor Organisation, speakers from Europe and Asia, and distinguished ladies and gentlemen.

Good morning.

I am Won-byung CHOI, Chairman of the National Agricultural Cooperative Federation of Korea in charge of ICAO.

It is a great pleasure to see you here in the historic city of Cracow. It is especially an honor to present the opening address at the ICAO-NCC Joint Seminar today.

I would first like to extend my deepest gratitude to the staff of NCC who have gone to great lengths in preparing this meeting, together with the many Agricultural Cooperators and participants from Central and Eastern Europe and Asia.

I think it is an extremely valuable opportunity for us to hear from 1 cooperators and government officials from two continents as they share their experience spanning the last two decades on the transition from planned economies to market economies which will help us all to deliberate the future directions we must take in order to overcome the challenges arising from the global economic crisis.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Agricultural cooperatives play key roles in the national economy of rapidly developing countries undergoing industrialization, especially countries in transition economies.

There have been many studies and discussions in both academia and in business worlds regarding the role of agricultural cooperatives in transition economies of Eastern Europe. During the early transition period from planned economies, many agricultural cooperatives had lost the confidence of their members and experienced significant difficulties in adjusting to market economies.

The top-down cooperative movement initiated by the government has shown many disadvantages in history, though we cannot ignore the advantages including fast organization and government support in the early stages of the movement. Korea's NACF which was established by the Korean government initiative in 1961 has grown to become the world's fourth largest cooperative in a short period. However, we also have been through many trial and errors transforming from top-down to bottom-up structures after 1980s.

Historically, Europe and Asia have taken noticeably different political and cultural roads. With regard to political systems, Asian countries have been run largely by strong centralized authorities and have in turn, inherited the top-down political system. While a decentralized political system based on grass roots governing has prevailed in Europe. Culturally Europeans have a more liberal outlook, centered around Christianity, while Asians take a more conservative approach to life due to the Confucianist value system.

I hope this seminar provides an opportunity not only to exchange the experience of the two different continents but also to fuse them for the better future of the cooperative movement in the global era.

The cooperatives have to be the farmers' right-hand, to provide them with comprehensive agricultural marketing and financial services. They have a critical role in protecting small scale farmers and ensuring farmers' well-being as much as possible.

Distinguished guests,

To overcome the current global crisis, we must be aware of the limitations of individual cooperative efforts. . Cooperatives should cooperate with each other under a cooperative spirit to achieve great things and overcome present economic hardships.

In addition to the cooperatives' hard work, the support of government and stakeholders' is absolutely imperative for farmers to weather current difficulties.

I was informed that NCC agreed to launch a cooperation project with the Vietnamese Cooperative Alliance when they met the ICAO conference held in Hanoi, Vietnam last December.

Though these two organizations are far from each other geographically, both have been through the socialist economy in the 20th century. I believe there will be much knowledge and experience to share that will be of great help to the organizations and their members.

I look forward to the wealth of experience and information that will be exchanged by the speakers from Europe and Asia and I expect that all participants will benefit tremendously from their words. .

In closing, I would like to extend my gratitude to today's co-host, Mr. Domagalski, NCC President, and Mr. Baiartaikhan, President of National Association of Mongolian Agricultural Cooperatives, and other speakers once again. Thank for your continued cooperation and I wish you all the very best in the future.

THANK YOU.