

Summary of the Secretary-General's statement

Speaking to delegates, advisers, observers, and guests in the morning on 21 October, Secretary-General Mari Amano expressed gratitude to the Government of Sri Lanka for its hospitality and generosity in hosting the WSM. He then summarized the three primary objectives: reconfirm the lineup of projects for the 2015–2016 biennium; share objectives and plans in key economic sectors to guide the APO in the development of programs for 2017 and 2018; and discuss the draft APO 2020 roadmap before endorsing it for eventual approval by the Governing Body.

The preliminary 2015–2016 Program Plan had been approved by the 2014 GBM in Hanoi, along with a 5% increase in the budget without increasing total membership contributions. The increased budget made it possible to add projects: 10 more in 2015 and 12 in 2016, noted the Secretary-General. “Each member country should ideally host at least one multicountry project in the spirit of mutual cooperation. This will also help enhance the relevancy and raise the awareness and visibility of APO activities in host member countries,” he reminded the meeting.

As an “interesting” project completed this year, Secretary-General Amano cited the Eco-products International Fair (EPIF) held in Taipei, which attracted widespread media attention and high-level government support. The Taipei Outcome Document drafted at the parallel conference was accepted by the UN as part of the inputs into its new sustainable development goals. However, he regretfully stated that the EPIF would not take place in 2015 but assured the WSM that the Secretariat would instead focus on the 2016 fair.

Another interesting development was the official launch of a new three-year cooperative agreement with Cornell University. “The 19 participants in the inaugural program were the proud recipients of certificates issued jointly by the APO and Cornell University. The APO is now discussing deepening that cooperation, which will likely include joint research projects in agriculture,” announced the Secretary-General. “With the continued support and generosity of the Japanese government, we were also able to implement four highly visible projects covering diverse topics such as solar energy, wastewater management, and agribusiness,” he reported.



Secretary-General Mari Amano. Photo courtesy of National Productivity Secretariat.

Noting that individual-country programs had seen higher participation rates with the total number of projects rising to 78 to date compared with 56 in the same period last year, Secretary-General Amano pointed out that, “This is a huge 30% increase in APO activities within member countries which should also lead to more learning opportunities as well as higher visibility. Allow me to express the gratitude of the APO to some of the NPO heads present for throwing their support behind programs such as I-OSM and BCBN by agreeing to host more such projects in the APO spirit of mutual cooperation.”

In terms of visibility, this year alone APO activities had already been covered more than 760 times in media across Asia and in nonmember countries such as the UK and France, compared with 270 times in all of 2013. The Secretary-General thanked member countries for their tremendous efforts to coordinate with the Secretariat in creating newsworthy events. He referred to the renovated APO website with a more modern, user-friendly format and to plans for an APO Portal to serve as the focal point for liaison officers, participants, experts, and others to enable them to collaborate, access project information, browse databases, download e-books, and participate in e-learning courses.

An “exciting” development, said the Secretary-General, was the announcement of the first APO Mobile Productivity Database app and 2014 edition of the *APO Productivity Databook* at a press conference on 17 October in Tokyo. The app for smartphones gives easy access to com-

prehensive economic and productivity data and information on APO members as well as other major economies.

“In summary, during the first three quarters of 2014, the APO has undertaken 118 projects. The number of projects for the full year will exceed the 139 achieved for the whole of last year, with the final number depending largely on the utilization rate of individual-country programs by member countries,” pointed out the Secretary-General, adding that, “These numbers are expected to rise as the Secretariat is committed to implementing all 2014 projects within this year barring unforeseen circumstances as well as to undertaking five additional projects approved by the Governing Body about two months ago.” For 2015–2016, the number of projects implemented was bound to increase due to the 5% budget increase. He questioned whether the APO could significantly raise the visibility and impact of its activities by doubling or tripling the annual budget and how to bridge the gap between the high expectations of member countries and actual achievements. “This has been the dilemma facing me since I assumed the post of the APO Secretary-General just over a year ago,” he acknowledged.

He then explained some learning points from when he served as Deputy Secretary-General of the OECD. While admitting that it was not realistic to compare the two organizations in terms of size, budget, or staff strength, he suggested that the APO could adapt some good ideas, best practices, or signature activities from the OECD. An example was the OECD focus on making policy recommendations then implemented by member governments. The progress on the recommendations is tracked through peer reviews, which underpin the OECD monitoring mechanism. “The APO may perhaps wish to adopt a similar methodology to encourage member governments to implement policies,” he proposed.

“My hope is that delegates will be able to contribute even more and better ideas during the breakout sessions to discuss the draft roadmap that will help shape the future of APO programs. This will go a long way to help the APO become the leading international organization in the area of productivity. That can only happen if there is a strategic shift in the way the APO carries out its mission with the unequivocal support of all mem-

ber countries. I hope to count on your support to achieve this,” continued the Secretary-General.

Secretary-General Amano pointed out that the success of APO projects depended on both the ability of Secretariat staff and host countries to create high-quality programs with suitable experts and the quality of participants. He urged member countries to nominate only those meeting the criteria in project notifications. The Secretariat would start monitoring participants carefully and providing feedback to member countries.

As outlined at the last GBM, the idea of strengthening the working relationship between the Secretariat and NPOs through a one-year staff attachment scheme at the Secretariat was ready for a pilot test from 2015 with two NPO staff, reported the Secretary-General but, “Whether it takes off or not will depend on whether NPOs find it useful and relevant.” As also mentioned at that GBM, expansion of the reach of e-learning courses including translating the course materials into local languages was a high-priority area, and the Secretary-General invited delegates to provide suggestions on course subjects during the breakout sessions. He also touched on plans to increase the office space of the Secretariat and possibly acquire videoconference facilities.

The Secretary-General was happy to report that, “METI has approved an annual cash grant of about US\$600,000 for 2015 and 2016. This is on top of the special cash grants provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. On behalf of the APO, I would like to thank the Government of Japan and the Government of the Republic of China for their generous cash grants.”

In concluding his statement, the Secretary-General reminded delegates that, “This WSM will be a very important exercise to plan for the future, and I am looking forward to our discussions over the next three days. There is another equally important reason to bring together all our key APO stakeholders, which is to create opportunities for you to build networks and friendships. The strategic objectives of the APO cannot be achieved without the mutual cooperation and strong bonds between everyone involved in the organization. I hope that this WSM will help to cement the already strong relationships that our NPOs enjoy. I once again thank our hosts, the Government of Sri Lanka, the National Productivity Secretariat, and other agencies that have helped make this WSM in Sri Lanka possible.” 🌟