



Promotion of economic partnership in the region, and productivity cooperation among APO member countries

The Japan Productivity Center for Socio-Economic Development (JPC-SED) organized a symposium on the promotion of economic partnerships in the Asian region on 13 June as one of its 50th anniversary events. The main objective of the symposium was to discuss ways to promote regional economic integration and the role of NPOs. The symposium provided a forum for the exchange of ideas on how to achieve sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific region through economic integration and to discuss ways to promote exchanges on productivity improvement experiences among NPOs. The JPC-SED purposely held this symposium one day before the 47th APO Governing Body Meeting so that delegates could also attend the symposium.

Jiro Ushio, Chairman of the JPC-SED and Chairman of Ushio Inc., gave the opening remarks. Welcoming participants to the symposium, Ushio mentioned that the timing of symposium could not be better for determining priority themes of the productivity movement in Asia and the Pacific region and expressed the hope that the symposium would help improve the visibility of the movement. Haruhiko Kuroda, President of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) delivered the keynote speech. He mentioned that Japan's postwar economic growth had been unprecedented. The establishment of the APO at the initiative of the government of Japan and Japan Productivity Center was a response to a world in awe of Japan's success. Currently, Asia is in a position of economic prominence thanks to its willingness to adopt market-based reforms and reduce government intervention in national economies as well as its ability to embrace globalization. Kuroda pointed out that Asia's rapid growth had also been accompanied by a dramatic decline in the incidence of poverty and improvements in social indicators. However, further reduction of poverty is still a challenge, particularly in less developed parts of Asia. In the more developed areas, there are other challenges. After the 1997 Asian financial crisis, many countries in East Asia realized the importance of a sound financial sector in sustaining strong growth and preserving competitive advantage. In the next



Panel discussion in progress

stage of development, Kuroda pointed out that Asia needs to give increasing importance to integrating both within itself and with the rest of the world. The challenge lies in maximizing the benefits of interdependence and accelerating

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economic growth by facilitating regional integration. He further mentioned that to minimize the risks and maximize the benefits of interdependence, Asian countries are now working to strengthen regional cooperation in trade and investment, finance, and infrastructure. In trade and investment, free and regional trade agreements have been proliferating. Kuroda cautioned that it is important to ensure consistency among these agreements and with multilateral trade liberalization under the WTO framework. Market-based reforms have been critical to Asia's growth and development, he mentioned, but to reap the full benefits, countries must now move toward the adoption and implementation of comprehensive competition policies. Kuroda concluded by noting that governments in the region are responding to the challenges of growth and development with greater connectivity and

improved competitiveness, and this trend is helping the region to move toward becoming a true economic community.

The symposium concluded with a panel discussion on "Economic Tie-ups in Asia and Productivity Improvement." Prof. Shujiro Urata, of Waseda University Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies, served as chair. Panel members were Loh Khum Yean, Chief Executive of the Standards, Productivity and Innovation Board of Singapore; Chakramon Phasukavanich, Chairman of the Thailand Productivity Institute and Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Industry, Thailand; Makoto Nakajima, Director-General, Trade and Economic Cooperation Bureau of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, Japan; and Yoji Ohashi, Chairman of the Board of All Nippon Airways Co. Ltd. 