

Secretary-General's address at the Roundtable Conference for the Promotion of the Productivity Movement in Africa

The following is an abridged version of the address given by APO Secretary-General Shigeo Takenaka at the opening of the Roundtable Conference for the Promotion of the Productivity Movement in Africa on 28 August.

It is a great pleasure for me to be here in the Republic of South Africa to attend the Roundtable Conference (RTC) for the Promotion of the Productivity Movement in Africa, which the Asian Productivity Organization has the honor of sponsoring, and to address such distinguished guests and participants from Africa and Asia. It is my sincere hope that this conference will provide timely momentum for enhancing economic development through higher productivity in the participating African countries. It is also my hope that the conference will allow PAPA to play an even greater role on the African continent with renewed support from its members.

Sometime ago, I saw on television an interview with Mr. Carlos Ghosn, President and CEO of Nissan Motor Company, a leading Japanese automaker. Mr. Ghosn was responsible for the successful turnaround of the company, from one that was losing money to a highly competitive enterprise in the global market. When asked about the most difficult obstacle that stood in the way of achieving this, he answered that it was not a lack of funds or other resources but a lack of realization on the part of his staff that things could be changed. Until they realized that the old, established way was not the only way to do business, it was not possible for him to introduce any reform measures. However, once that mindset had changed, other things gradually fell into place.

I believe that changing mindsets is what the productivity movement is all about. To establish the belief that we can change past practices, do better, and compete with the best in the world is an essential ingredient for achieving sustained economic development. The fact that Asia has achieved the highest economic growth rates in the world in the last half-century is not unrelated to the existence of many vibrant national productivity organizations (NPOs) in the Asia-Pacific region and the



Secretary-General Shigeo Takenaka (file photo)

activities of the APO, the only intergovernmental regional organization actively promoting the cause of productivity.

The NPOs occupy a pivotal position in the productivity movement, guiding, coordinating, and orchestrating other stakeholders. For NPOs to perform such functions, they must enjoy a high degree of autonomy, support, and flexibility. The government has a crucial role to play in raising awareness about productivity among its people and industry and nurturing their positive attitude toward productivity improvement. The effectiveness and sustainability of a productivity movement depends on the extent to which the government commits itself to it because the productivity movement calls for considerable financial outlays, and in many countries only the government can provide funding on a regular and sustained basis. Productivity is neither a monopoly of the NPO nor that of the government but cuts across all sectors and embraces all actors and layers of society. Toward that end, the NPO must ensure that it secures the widest representation and participation, including labor and business.

The APO's productivity journey may offer valuable lessons to other like-minded organizations. First, the financial commitment of member countries is a *sine qua non* to make a multilateral organization viable and sustainable. Second, the existence of a

core country or countries willing to play a leadership role is crucial to keep momentum for organizational growth. And third, the development of a network of cooperation among member countries, with the more advanced member countries acting as mentors to the less advanced ones, is of particular value to narrow the productivity gap between them.

The participation of the experienced resource persons from APO member countries in this conference is clear evidence of the mutual cooperation that is the APO's bedrock spirit. Without the concerted effort, commitment, and action of people like them, the APO could not have been as effective as it is today. It is our sincere wish that all the distinguished participants who are present here today at this RTC will join hands, hearts, and minds for the sake of productivity improvement in the African region.

I have noted the excellent arrangements made for the conference by the host organizations, the National Productivity Institute of South Africa and PAPA. I want to commend the leadership exercised by Dr. Yvonne Dladla and Mr. Thembo Lebang and express my deepest appreciation to Minister of Labour Membathisi Mdladlana of the Republic of South Africa for his gracious presence. My special thanks go to Mr. Nelson Mandela for sending his video message. Nothing is more encouraging than the blessing of the most respected living statesman in the entire world. I would also like to take this opportunity to extend my heartiest congratulations to participants from Botswana, Kenya, Mauritius, Nigeria, Tanzania, Zambia, and the Republic of South Africa for their timely decision and commitment to revitalize the productivity movement in their respective countries.

I look forward to the outcome of this conference and hope that the results derived in the form of productivity master plans will be tangible and action oriented with clear guidelines and roadmaps for the participating NPOs and PAPA. Last but not least, I wish to express my heartfelt appreciation to the Japanese government for the financial support to implement this RTC.