

WELCOME SPEECH

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Father Jose Cruz, Professor Surichai Wun'Gaeo, Professor Resil Mojares, members of the International Selection Committee, API Fellows, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. While I cannot be with you today, I am deeply pleased to be able to say a few words at the start of this very important 11th API Regional Workshop.

As you know, one of the most important changes taking place in the region today is Myanmar's movement toward democracy. As Japanese Government Goodwill Ambassador for the Welfare of the National Races in Myanmar, I am striving to help bring about a ceasefire and peace accord between the nation's government and its ethnic groups.

Last month, I invited representatives of 10 ethnic groups to Japan to discuss possible relief measures for the nation's 1 million internally displaced people. As a result, The Nippon Foundation decided to contribute 3 million dollars of emergency food and medical supplies. The foundation is acting as a mediator between the two sides and both welcome this emergency relief.

When API started in the year 2000, we discussed urgent issues common to the region. The growing gap between rich and poor. Exploitation of natural resources. Environmental destruction. Religious and ethnic conflict. Human rights violations.

All of which continue to confront us even today. From the beginning, we have realized that to solve these problems, we need close collaboration among such stakeholders as governments, international bodies, private enterprises, academic institutions, NGOs and community organizations. We need to transcend boundaries and work together. Above all, we need public intellectuals who can drive forward such cross-border collaborations.

Thus, this API Program began in order to identify and nurture regional public intellectuals. The program selects those with the knowledge, experience and commitment to deal with complex issues. Then,

it gives you, the selected individuals with opportunities to conduct research and exchange activities in neighboring countries.

A second aim has been to create a community of public intellectuals that can work together collectively to solve problems, and in June this year, the API Regional Project Culminating Event was held in Bangkok. This was the apex of a three-year project, through which Fellows combined their expertise on shared themes. Working with people from local communities, they rooted out the causes and devised solutions for many pressing issues. The results of their work will be disseminated throughout the region and the world, through documentary films, a book and a website. I hope that API Fellows continue leading the way with such collective work as this.

I congratulate you, the 11th batch of Fellows on the successful completion of your projects. I also encourage you all, both as members of the API Community and as public intellectuals responsible for the future of Asia, to continue to work for the betterment of society under the flag of API.

This year, for the first time, API has selected Fellows from Myanmar. I sincerely hope that these new Myanmar Fellows have many chances to meet Fellows from other countries, so that you can learn from each other, share information and contribute to the democratization and peace-building process in Myanmar.

Finally, I would like to express my deep gratitude to Vice President Jose Cruz and everyone at Ateneo de Manila University. I also sincerely thank the members of each country's selection committee, the International Selection Committee and the staff of the Coordinating Institution and Partner Institutions for your continuous hard work. It is you that have enabled this program to achieve such great results. I wish you a fruitful and successful workshop.