

WELCOME SPEECH

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We have already heard from Professor Surichai Wun’Gaeo. I too wish to extend my deepest condolences to all those who suffered losses in the recent typhoon in the Philippines.

Coming from a country where many people died or were forced out of their homes following the catastrophic earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan in 2011, I truly feel for what the people in the Philippines are going through. I appreciate how hard it is to lose one’s loved ones, friends, homes, and possessions.

Following the events of March 11, 2011 we gained strength and encouragement from the compassion shown by people in this region, which we remember still. We owe much to the API community.

This kind of tragedy, terrible though it is, strengthens our bonds; it confirms our connectedness.

When API was started in 2000, there were two objectives.

The first objective was to create an opportunity for leading public intellectuals to conduct research and carry out projects on issues of common concern to this region, in order to provide answers to the various problems and challenges facing society.

The second objective was to connect those public intellectuals, form a community, and create an influential collective entity that would collaborate on finding solutions to those challenges.

In terms of the first objective, I would say we have been very successful in identifying public intellectuals and helping them to achieve success in their work.

But I think we are only halfway to achieving the second objective. We have “connectedness,” and we share a sense of being connected. And yet we have still to succeed in creating an initiative or mechanism that utilizes this collective cooperation to solve problems.

The biggest success has been the regional project, but that required significant resources and a lot of effort on the part of the participants. To do the same again would, I think, be difficult. So the big questions as we consider the future of the API are: “Where do we go from here?” “What do we do and how?”

API has many key words. **Asian**—which represents the region and our identity; **Public**—this is who and what API is for; and **Intellectuals**—this represents the kind of human resources that make up API, human resources that seek out the challenges, carry out the research, consider the results, and come up with solutions. The term “intellectuals” stands for people with wisdom, knowledge, and experience. **Regional** and **collaboration** are two more words that often come up, because we collaborate on regional issues and come up with solutions.

The keynote speaker at the Regional Workshop the year before last was the social activist from Laos, Sombath Somphone, a Ramon Magsaysay awardee. In his speech, he underscored the importance of connectivity, of connectedness. These words are important in describing the relationship between us in the API community, and yet they had not been used very much until then. I believe they are going to be key words for API from now on. We can see this connectedness in our collective desire to help the Philippines.

Unfortunately, we are not connecting with the person who used these words, Sombath Somphone. He disappeared last December and his whereabouts are unknown. I truly hope that he will reappear soon and that we will reconnect.

Historians are now turning their attention to this concept of connectedness. Recently, I had the opportunity to hear Harvard Emeritus Professor Akira Iriye speak. When asked about the prospects for an Asia Pacific community, he foresaw the strengthening of links between citizens, more than a coming together of independent sovereign states.

Along these lines, the focus of recent historical research is shifting from the history of states to the history of connections—in other words, looking at history through connections within human society. Connections or connectedness are thus important.

Sombath told us that our links, our interconnectedness would create our future. Connections and sharing between people, between communities, between experiences, between knowledge, between good practices—those would be our strengths, and social media would assist us.

ASEAN is heading toward the formation of an ASEAN community by 2015. First and foremost this involves connecting states, and it also means strengthening the links between peoples and building a people-centered community. And as the movement of peoples increases, we can assume that their interconnectedness will increase as well. We can also expect transnational connections between NGOs and CSOs to play a key role in problem solving.

It is now 13 years since API started. In that time, the political, economic, social and cultural contexts of this region have changed enormously. More than links between

nation states, what has been conspicuous is the growth of transnational ties between citizens, between citizens' groups, and between groups that share a common vocation or face a common problem.

When I think about these developments, I feel proud that API has played a significant role in fostering this interconnectivity.

The role of public intellectuals is to be a catalyst for connecting citizens, more acting as a catalyst for connecting states. For us, the place where we make those connections is Asia. Encountering different races and cultures, and learning to respect and understand other points of view lead to an awareness of human rights.

The future will be a future of connectedness – regionally and globally. What I hope to see is the API community playing an even stronger catalytic role in furthering this process.

It is also my hope that, in the not too distant future, the 12th batch of Fellows at this workshop will form the core of the API community.

Thank you.