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Statement delivered by

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*His Excellency President Jose De Venecia, Jr., Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Philippines,
National delegation members,
Ladies and gentlemen,*

I am greatly honored to be given this opportunity to speak on behalf of the house of Representatives of the Japanese Diet.

The year 2006 marks the fiftieth anniversary of Japan's membership of the United Nations and also the fiftieth anniversary of the restoration of diplomatic relations between Japan and the Philippines.

After World War II, reflecting deeply on the fact that Japan brought much damage and pain especially to the people of Asian countries through the mistaken national policy of colonial rule and invasion, Japan has adopted the values and concepts of liberty, democracy, and respect for basic human rights as the basic principles of its politics and has continued national building as a pacifist state. And today, amid an environment of domestic stability and friendly relations with other countries, it can truly be said that Japan's simultaneous achievement of democratic maturity and economic development was the result of its pacifism.

Japan does not intend to enjoy the fruits of this peace only by itself, though. While fulfilling its responsibilities to ASEAN countries, South Korea, and others regarding postwar reparations and quasi-reparations, Japan joined the Colombo Plan in 1954, shortly after achieving economic independence itself, and became a donor of official development assistance.

Among this assistance, since the ASEAN region has close ties with Japan geographically, politically, and economically, and since the political and economic stability of Southeast Asian countries are essential for the stability and prosperity of the East Asian region as a whole, ASEAN has been positioned as a priority region in Japanese ODA. Recently, in addition to conventional ODA directed toward the development of backward districts, such as the Mekong area, Japan has provided cooperation utilizing ODA also in such areas as antiterrorism, antipiracy, and disaster countermeasures. Such assistance has included grants for strengthening security at main airports and harbors in Indonesia and for bolstering that country's national police functions; \$500 million in grant assistance for reconstruction following the Sumatra earthquake and Indian Ocean tsunami; and the announcement of a total of \$135 million assistance for countermeasures against avian flu and other new types of influenza.

Japan and ASEAN have a 30-year history of friendship and trust, but now, more than ever before, this relationship is transforming into a strategic partnership to deal with the problems of East Asia as a whole from an equal standpoint.

As well as reconfirming the determination of both sides to deepen and broaden this strategic partnership, the joint statement on “Deepening and Broadening of the Japan-ASEAN Strategic Partnership,” which was issued at the 9th Japan-ASEAN Summit held in Kuala Lumpur in December of last year, also proclaimed Japan’s support for efforts to address regional and international issues, such as countermeasures against HIV/AIDS and other new and reemerging infectious diseases, the implementation of Japan-ASEAN antiterrorist consultations, and the building of a tsunami early-warning system.

At the summit, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi announced a contribution of ¥7.5 billion to the ASEAN Development Fund, the first by a country outside the ASEAN region. This was a clear demonstration of Japan’s attitude of continuing to place extreme importance on ASEAN.

At present Japan is the largest nonregional trading partner for ASEAN, and ASEAN is a most important trade and investment partner for Japan. With regard to investment, from 1995 to 2003 Japan’s investment in the ASEAN countries was 44 times greater than China’s and 11 times greater than South Korea’s. Japan and ASEAN are making efforts to conclude negotiations on a comprehensive economic partnership by April 2007 at the least. The fourth round of negotiations was held in Jakarta in July of this year. Furthermore, the text of an agreement with Malaysia also went into effect in July of this year. Negotiations with Indonesia have entered important phases, and talks with Vietnam and Brunei have begun as well. And EPA with the Philippines was signed just on September 9th.

EPA covers a wide range of fields, such as investment, intellectual property, people-to-people exchange, establishment of the business environment, harmonization of economic systems, and the formation of rules for cooperation and so on. It is hoped, therefore, that an EPA will contribute tremendously to the formation of an even closer partnership between Japan and ASEAN.

However, EPAs and FTAs will not take the place of the World Trade Organization. It is the building and maintenance of a multilateral free trade system that will bring about economic development and prosperity for all countries, and this is an important issue in terms of the eradication of poverty.

At present negotiations among countries concerning the materialization of commitments in the Doha Round, including especially the reduction and elimination of export subsidies for agricultural products, the pros and cons of introducing limitations or tariff ceilings for important products, and the handling of nonagricultural market access, have reached a standstill, and achieving the target of a final agreement by the end of this year looks almost impossible.

We must not forget, however, that the principal agenda item of this round is the economic development of developing countries. The failure of negotiations in the WTO not only will lead to the backbreaking of free trade and the reemergence of protectionism but also will mean that the parties concerned and related countries, and especially the major developed nations, are abandoning their responsibilities for the eradication of poverty and leaving development disparities and economic disparities untouched. That in turn would cause developing countries to lose faith in the WTO and at the same time preserve destabilizing factors that threaten the stability and security of the region and the world, including the developed nations.

Since North Korea, which has openly declared that it is a nuclear state and possesses nuclear weapons, is a neighbor of Japan, we believe that preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, missiles, and related substances is an important issue that is directly connected with the security of Japan. Nevertheless, North Korea has unilaterally scrapped its international pledges, such as its announcement of a moratorium on missile launch tests in September 1999, the Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration in September 2002, and its declaration of a continued moratorium at the second Japan-DPRK summit in May 2004, and, in defiance of warnings from related countries, including Japan, went ahead with test launches on seven missiles, including a long distance ballistic missile, on July 5 of this year.

It must be said that the recent missile launches by North Korea ridiculed and trampled on the efforts of China and the other participant countries in the six-party talks, other than North Korea, to find solutions to the nuclear, missile, and other problems of North Korea through discussions. At the same time, they damaged the security, peace, and stability of countries in the Asia-Pacific region and also, from the perspective of the nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction, posed a serious threat to the international community as a whole. Regarding this outrageous act, it is perfectly natural that North Korea has been severely criticized by the international community, for example in a resolution censuring Pyongyang adopted unanimously by the United Nations Security Council and in the chair's summary at the G8 summit.

From now on also the Japanese Diet will endeavor to eliminate threats to regional and international security and peace through participation in the AIPO and dialogue with other countries. I ask ASEAN and the parliamentarians participating in this assembly for even stronger support in persuading North Korea to completely abandon its nuclear programs and to return quickly to the six-party talks.

Asia is on the way toward a major transformation into a community that shares the universal values of democracy, freedom, human rights, and the rule of law. As one parliamentarian, I intend to be involved in efforts to promote this historical transformation and to contribute positively toward the building of a framework so that all countries in the region can develop together and all people can enjoy the benefits of development based on free and orderly market economics.

Thank you for your kind attention.