

WELCOME SPEECH

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Ten years ago, The Nippon Foundation invited intellectuals from around Asia to an international conference to seek answers to the question, “What does Asia need right now?” At that conference, many important issues were raised. However, of particular concern was the fact that the people of Asia learned about their Asian neighbors through Western eyes, that Asians themselves knew little about each other, and that there were few opportunities for them to learn about their neighbors first hand. The conclusion drawn from thorough analysis and intensive discussions was that a new framework for research and exchange was necessary in order to allow the people of Asia to know their neighbors better and work in close collaboration to solve issues of common concern. Highlighted as particularly crucial were research activities by and exchanges between public intellectuals who use their capabilities and expertise to work for the public and social good.

As a means to address the issues identified at the conference, the API Fellowships Program was launched in 2000 with the goal of creating a better Asian society by nurturing and organizing a community of committed public intellectuals. In the eight years since, around 240 Fellows have been selected from among the public intellectuals in Asia, and these Fellows are now engaged in various activities for the public good. The API Community has also been steadily developing, and the Regional Project is about to officially begin. I am looking forward very much to seeing the results of these efforts in the months and years to come.

The objective of The Nippon Foundation is to create a prosperous and peaceful global society in which all members can be assured of their fundamental human rights. To realize this, the Foundation conducts many different activities both in Japan and overseas. In our society today, there are many pressing problems. It is of course impossible for a private foundation acting alone to address them all. Therefore, we prioritize the problems and identify what we as a private—as opposed to a governmental—organization can do, and then we take action.

The first area of the activities of the Foundation is maritime affairs, an area in which The Nippon Foundation is most privileged to have the cooperation of Indonesia and many other countries in Southeast Asia. Among the many activities we conduct within this field are creating anti-piracy measures, ensuring safe shipping routes in the Malacca Strait, and educating marine specialists and seafarers.

The second area is basic human needs, in which we provide support for the vulnerable and marginalized people in societies such as the sick, the disabled, and others. Our principal focus is our work to eliminate leprosy, which is coordinated by our chairman, Yohei Sasakawa. Other work in this area includes vocational training, education for the deaf, and training for persons who make and fit artificial limbs.

Human resource development is another important part of what we do. There is a Chinese proverb that says, “It takes ten years to grow a tree, a hundred to raise a man.” Likewise, the development of human resources takes time. The Nippon Foundation is committed to human resource development all over the world. One example of our work in this field is the Sasakawa Young Leaders Fellowship Fund, through which we provide scholarships to promising graduate students at 68 universities in 40 countries worldwide. In Indonesia, the funds that have already been established at Gadjah Mada University and the University of Indonesia are now contributing to the further development of the most promising graduate students.

To address the many challenges our world faces, it is crucial that we have a vast number of talented individuals who can unearth the root cause of problems, identify appropriate responses, and take the initiative to see them through to their successful conclusion. Through the human resource development projects we conduct at The Nippon Foundation, we aim to nurture and guide potential future leaders who possess the knowledge, skills and commitment to make a positive impact on society.

The API Fellowships Program is a unique project and the most advanced we conduct in the human resources development area. We, at The Nippon Foundation, hope very much that all of you, as individual public intellectuals, as members of the API Community, and as leaders of your own society, will play a central role in the development of the region.