

KOREA AFRICA FORUM

Opening Remarks by Mr Song Woong Yeob,
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Director Ms Nina Human of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Distinguished Scholars, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is my honour and pleasure to make this opening speech of the Korea-Africa Forum Intersessional Meeting 2007 here in the beautiful and energetic city of Johannesburg. The city has a special meaning because it is a symbol of the development, freedom and reconciliation that we are seeking through this forum.

In March 2006, taking into account the strategic importance of Africa, the president of the Republic of Korea, Mr Roh Moo-hyun, visited the African continent for the first time in 24 years. Although it seems rather late, President Roh's visit marked the turning point in Korean-African relations and helped to increase our interest and forged stronger diplomatic ties with African nations.

The presidential visit also led to the creation of the Korea Africa Forum, the first meeting of which was successfully held in Seoul, Korea, in November last year and at the Forum the Seoul Declaration was adopted whereby the Republic of Korea undertook to take part actively in international efforts to help Africa achieve its development goals. The forum established a dialogue channel in which government officials, scholars and business people from Korea and the countries of Africa can communicate with each other.

After the Forum I witnessed a surprising change in my country. The interest of Korea's people in Africa increased rapidly and widely. Not only business people, but also students, housewives and even elderly people began to read books about Africa and to travel more often to African countries.

The number of Korean travellers to Africa increased 14% from 2 766 per month to 3140. The number of people from Africa visiting Korea increased by 25% from 1757 to 2200 per month. This trend is very significant, because more interest would lead to more tangible fruits.

Today we will discuss basic but very timely issues of what the potential of Africa is; how to develop that potential; and how Korea can contribute to the development of that potential.

The world is now paying much more attention to Africa because of its energy and natural resources potential and equally because of its human resources. Furthermore, African countries are themselves aware of their own potential and are beginning to seek ways to develop it.

African countries are looking for eligible partners from all over the world to cooperate with. I am truly confident that Korea is one of the best partners and Koreans are ready

to cooperate with Africa by sharing their experience of economic development and political democratisation.

As we all expect, I am sure that today's forum will maintain the momentum we have established and will bring Korea and Africa ever closer.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to thank deeply National Director Elizabeth Sidiropoulos and Ambassador Tom Wheeler of the South African Institute of International Affairs and Dr Park Young-ho of the Korean Institute for International Economic Policy for their efforts in preparing this meaningful event.

Ladies and gentlemen, I very much appreciate your time and attention. Your understanding and support have always been important for our relations and will continue to be so in the years to come.

Last but not least, I sincerely congratulate the Springboks on their victory in the Rugby World Cup this year!

Thank you very much.