

OPENING REMARKS

*SETO Takeshi**

Distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and privilege for me to announce the opening of the Fourteenth Regional Seminar on Good Governance for Southeast Asian Countries.

We sincerely welcome all of you to this significant forum which is taking place in an online format for the first time in the history of this seminar. Due to the disruptions caused by the current pandemic, we have, very unfortunately, made the difficult decision to postpone all international training courses in Fiscal Year 2020. However, thanks to the advancement of technology, it is our great pleasure to be able to continue to host this seminar despite the pandemic. Some of the target countries have not been able to join the seminar under current situation this year, yet we are delighted that 10 countries, including Japan, are participating in this seminar.

Since 2007, this seminar has been an exceptional opportunity for criminal justice practitioners in Southeast Asian countries to share our experiences in pursuit of the eradication of corruption in this region. The seminar has been co-hosted by UNAFEI and participating countries: it was first held in Thailand, and then the Philippines, Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Viet Nam, and last year Japan again.

Over these thirteen years, we have discussed many important issues in anti-corruption legislation and criminal justice practices in this region. This time, in our two-day discussion, we will focus on “Integrity and Independence of Judges, Prosecutors and Law Enforcement Officials”. One of the most important responsibilities of the criminal justice system is to detect corruption and impose appropriate punishment on corrupt politicians and public officials. However, if the criminal justice system, itself, is corrupt, there is no one left to stop the serious risks to democracy and the rule of law. Thus, the integrity of judges, prosecutors and law enforcement officials is essential. At the same time, if decisions are influenced by undue external pressures such as political interference, the rule of law will also be undermined. Thus, the independence of judges, prosecutors and law enforcement officials, which facilitates their impartiality, is also indispensable. For this reason, we find it extremely useful to visit this fundamental topic to share each participating country’s legal frameworks, current situation and best practices on this issue.

In order to deepen our discussion, as a visiting expert, we welcome in this seminar Mr. Lawrence Chung, the Principal International Liaison and Training Officer at the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) in Hong Kong. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Mr. Chung for joining us to share his expertise and experiences.

* Director, United Nations Asia and Far East Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (UNAFEI).

To all of the distinguished participants, I would also like to thank you for taking valuable time away from your work to make precious contributions to this seminar. I can assure you that all of us will learn from each other and that will put us further on the path toward eliminating corruption.

In this seminar, UNAFEI has continued its practice of inviting participants from one or two criminal justice organizations from each country. And as I said before, some of these organizations co-hosted previous seminars. I believe this system establishes not only a personal network among participants but also an organizational network.

I look forward to seeing this seminar provide a useful forum to exchange expertise and experience in our common endeavour against corruption, contributing further to the promotion of good governance in Southeast Asia.

Thank you very much for your attention.