

ANTARCTIC TREATY
XIXth CONSULTATIVE MEETING

TRAITÉ SUR L'ANTARCTIQUE
XIX^{ème} RÉUNION CONSULTATIVE



SEOUL
May 8-19, 1995

TRATADO ANTARTICO
XIX REUNION CONSULTIVA

ДОГОВОР ОБ АНТАРКТИКЕ
XIX КОНСУЛЬТАТИВНОЕ СОВЕЩАНИЕ

XIX ATCM/INF 98
May 15, 1995
Original: English

**OPENING ADDRESS BY
THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA**

Agenda Item 3

**Opening Address by H.E. GONG Ro-Myung
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea
at the Plenary
of the 19th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting
(Seoul, May 15, 1995)**

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates of Parties to the Antarctic Treaty,
Experts from international organizations, Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Korea, I would like to extend my warmest welcome to all the participants in the Nineteenth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting.

Korea acceded to the Antarctic Treaty in 1986. Two years later, the Korean Government established King Sejong Station on King George Island, as a base for its scientific research. Since becoming an Antarctic Treaty Consultative Party in 1989, Korea has attached increasing importance to Antarctica and is expanding its research activities.

Considering the relatively short history of Korea's Antarctic activities, my Government is all the more honored to host such an important meeting as the ATCM.

I am sure that this meeting will provide us with an excellent opportunity to closely cooperate with other Parties and to make a significant contribution to the Antarctic Treaty System.

The current ATCM marks a turning point in its history. This meeting is the first to take place on an annual basis. Holding the ATCM annually will make it possible for the Consultative Parties to better coordinate their activities in the region and to discuss pressing Antarctic issues. It is also noteworthy that the Transitional Environmental Working Group successfully completed its first meeting last week. I hope that this special working group will become an effective tool in dealing with environmental issues in Antarctica, pending the creation of the Committee for Environmental Protection.

There are a number of important issues which must be dealt with at this meeting.

First and foremost is how to coordinate our best efforts to protect the Antarctic environment. Antarctica, the largest remaining wilderness on earth, is reserved for peace and scientific research for all mankind, thanks to the Antarctic Treaty System. However, the intensification of human activity on the continent is posing an increasing threat to its integrity and ecosystem. I believe that it is not only Consultative Parties' right but also their duty to preserve Antarctica.

To this end, it is vital to speed up the implementation of the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty by bringing it into force at the earliest possible date. Korea is working to join the Consultative Parties which have already ratified the Protocol. The Korean Government will soon deposit the instrument of ratification when the domestic process is completed.

Moreover, in order to make more effective the enforcement of environmental conservation in the Antarctic Treaty area, a system of liability for environmental damage should be introduced as soon as possible. I expect that substantial progress will be made on this task during this meeting.

Another important subject which must be addressed at this meeting is how to strengthen the Antarctic Treaty System as a whole. Looking back upon the history of the Antarctic Treaty System, we find that it has been quite successful in promoting the fundamental principles of the Antarctic Treaty. But remarkable changes are taking place with regard to the Antarctic Treaty System. The most significant ones are the growth in the number of the Consultative Parties and an increasingly specialized agenda. The time has come for us to take the necessary steps to make the Treaty System more effective and adaptable to a rapidly evolving situation. I am sure that all Consultative Parties recognize the need to promptly establish a permanent secretariat. I sincerely hope that this matter will soon be resolved on the basis of consensus among all ATCPs.

Last but not least, dramatic changes in global weather patterns are being observed all over the globe. According to a recent report, the average temperature on the Antarctic Peninsula has risen by 2.5 degrees centigrade over the past 50 years. The preservation of the earth's environment is now perceived as a life-or-death issue for all mankind. Antarctica is a unique area where early warning signs of global change can be easily detected. This compels us to reassess the scientific value of Antarctica in understanding global environmental change. For this reason, international cooperation is required to monitor global change in Antarctica in a comprehensive and systematic fashion.

I am confident that, in the spirit of cooperation and compromise which prevails in the Antarctic Treaty System, the Nineteenth ATCM will produce a fruitful outcome for the Antarctic as well as for mankind.

Finally, I wish all of you a pleasant and memorable stay in Seoul, Korea's 600-year-old capital, where the traditional and the modern coexist in harmony.

Thank you.