

Opening Address

By Dr. Nam Viyaketh, Minister of Industry and Commerce

Secretary-General Ryuichiro Yamazaki of the Asian Productivity Organization,

Distinguished Delegates,

Advisers,

Observers, and

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The Asian Productivity Organization (APO) was established in 1961 and now has 20 governments in Asia and the Pacific as members. The APO acts as a think tank, facilitating the exchange of productivity knowledge and information in the region, through human resources development in industry, agriculture, service, and other sectors. Lao PDR became a member of the APO on 18 June 2002.

Currently, the government has assigned the Small and Medium Enterprise Promotion and Development Office, under the umbrella of the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, to act as Lao PDR's National Productivity Organization (NPO) to perform the roles of think tank, catalyst, regional adviser, institution builder, and clearinghouse for productivity information within the country. On behalf of the Government of Lao PDR, I cordially welcome you and express our sincere gratitude to you all for attending the 52nd Workshop Meeting of Heads of NPOs (WSM) here in Vientiane, the capital of our country. I am delighted to see you all.

Productivity is a critical ingredient for national development. In the past, the APO has made significant contributions to increasing productivity in countries in the Asia-Pacific region and it is not an exaggeration to consider the APO as the spearhead of the productivity movement. This has been greatly appreciated by all its members. The APO has not only facilitated links among member countries but also with nonmember countries and other international organizations. These have all been made possible by the tireless efforts of the APO Secretariat headed by the Secretary-General and the respective NPOs.

The progress of integration in regional and global markets creates for Lao PDR, like other countries, enormous challenges, but also provides a number of opportunities. Competition in domestic and regional markets will surely increase. Therefore, concerted efforts are necessary to enhance the conditions for sustaining and continuing productivity improvement. Naturally, productivity movements vary from one country to another as each one has to address specific situations and priorities and are guided by that particular country's needs and strategies.

The government of Lao PDR began decentralizing control and encouraging private enterprises in 1986. The results were striking, with a robust GDP growth during the past few years averaging around 6% to 7% annually, even during one of the worst global recessions. However, a significant share of this growth can be attributed to foreign direct investment in hydropower and mining. The integration of these large investments into the local economies remains challenging and it is further necessary to provide linkages to local companies and SMEs in particular.

It is therefore necessary to promote and boost productivity development in the country's manufacturing, service, and agriculture sectors, which generate substantial national employment. Let me assure you that the Government of Lao PDR is strongly committed to working in a close and cooperative manner with the APO Secretariat and APO member countries in order to share knowledge, exchange ideas, and learn from best practices. This will enable us to steer the productivity and quality movement in the right direction.

Lao PDR is honored to host this significant meeting. I am convinced that this WSM will be used to gain experience and knowledge from each other and thus contribute to more innovation in the productivity movement so that the common goals of economic growth and poverty alleviation will eventually be achieved.

Last, but not least, I wish all of you a very fruitful meeting and an enjoyable stay in Vientiane, Lao PDR. I declare this meeting open. Thank you.