

International Symposium on Paraguay-Korea Relations, Asunción, Paraguay

June 17, 2014
Keynote Address



Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

Distinguished esteemed, honored guests from abroad and from here in Paraguay, I am deeply honored to be here in Paraguay today to speak at this monumental gathering: the 1st International Symposium, “Towards an Alliance between Paraguay and Korea”.

Here, we are seeking to foster unity between two cultures and two beautiful countries that I hold close to my heart: Paraguay and Korea.

I want to thank the international participants who have traveled across the world to join us here in this symposium. Could we give our Korean guests a great round of applause?

And of course, for those Paraguayans who know me, you know I am an adopted son, and I consider this my second home in the American hemisphere. I would like to give all the leadership of Paraguay that are gathered here a round of applause as well.

And finally, I would like to appreciate the monumental and innovative work of IDPPS (*Instituto de Desarrollo del Pensamiento Patria Soñada*), the Paraguayan think tank, led by the able leadership of Dr. Altamirano.

Although I was born in South Korea, I was raised in the United States. Each time I visit Paraguay, I feel as if I have come back home.

I have traveled this country on horseback, in trucks, by boat and by plane. I have ridden with your cowboys, debated with your political and business leaders, and eaten together with the most humble of Paraguayans in the deep Chaco region.

The more time I spend here, the more my heart is moved by your people. I am convinced that this country is truly the “womb” of America from which a great rebirth can arise. It has a unique role to play in this region, for this continent, and this hemisphere.

Many exciting developments are taking place here in Paraguay, and the world is taking notice.

This is evidenced by the Organization of American States convening its General Assembly here in Paraguay, which you’ve convened so successfully. Give yourselves a round of applause. I congratulate you for your successful hosting of this major event and urge you to build upon that momentum, leading Paraguay to aspire to even greater dreams and heights.

Potential of Paraguay

Peace and prosperity cannot be secured in this world without nations that exemplify integrity, good governance, and responsibility, together with respect for the dignity of human beings, fundamental human rights, and the prosperity and the fundamental needs of all its peoples. I believe Paraguay has the potential, because you are a blank slate, to become such a model exhibiting the best practices around the world. Paraguay has enormous potential to become a central hub in this region in industry, distribution, and professional services, such as banking and accounting as well as the traditional industries of agriculture and recreation.

It is strategically located in the heart of South America, surrounded by the largest markets and resource centers in the region. With global concerns for meeting the basic needs of rising populations, Paraguay and this region of Latin America are well-positioned to play a major role.

Paraguay’s land is rich in natural resources, making it well-suited for farming, forestry, conservation, and eco-tourism. This region has abundant minerals and raw materials essential for industry and energy. Furthermore, this region has some of the most beautiful natural vistas, indigenous plant life and unique animal species. Paraguay is truly a blessed nation.

In addition, it is blessed with major waterways that are a natural source of transporting goods from the interior. The country's ready-access to rivers allows it to generate a growing amount of hydroelectric power making it a prime candidate for industrial development. Indeed, Paraguay has become one of the largest exporters of electricity in the world.

Through the hydrocarbons explorations taking place here, I am sure Paraguay will continue to discover other alternative sources of clean energy.

The most important resource, however, lies with its great human resources. The potential is in the Paraguayan people.

I observed the beauty of the Paraguayan people on my 2008 cattle drive in the Chaco.

Here, traditional and spiritual values, faith in God, and trust in family and community are still very much alive and are part of your people's daily lives. This is a key reason why this nation can become a model nation of national transformation.

A recent Gallup poll concluded that Paraguayans are the happiest people in the world. Are you?
(Applause)

This goes to show that true happiness is not derived solely from material success, but is rooted, once again, in our deep faith in God, in strong families and communities, and in our love of country. Despite the political and economic difficulties this nation has faced, these fundamental intrinsic attributes will enable the Paraguayan people to dream great dreams and will fuel great achievements, I believe, in the near future.

Most of all, Paraguay has a large youth population. With the right education, these youths can become the ethical and responsible leaders that can fulfill the Paraguayan Promise.

Developing the Paraguay and South Korea Partnership

Here in South America, Paraguay can become the center of a trading network, linking the Atlantic and the Pacific coasts and becoming a natural conduit between Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Bolivia, and the rest of the hemisphere.

However, Paraguay should also look outward beyond this continent. In this age of globalization, international partnerships will accelerate Paraguay's development.

The key is to find the right partner. It is time for an emerging Paraguay to leave its past isolationism behind and step out and embrace the world by looking across not just the Atlantic, but across the Pacific, in this age of Pan-Pacific Rim. The greatest movements in terms of economic development is going to happen not east, but west, across the Pacific, in the Pan-Pacific Rim. Paraguay needs to have the right partner.

Today's Symposium is an example of one of the important partnerships for Paraguay's future.

There is great opportunity and strategic value in a relationship between Paraguay and my birth nation of South Korea. That is why we have invited Korean business leaders as well as Korean media. I believe there are reporters from the two top Korean business journals in Korea. Could we have them stand? Where are you?

(Audience: Three)

Three? So three. Could you stand? I guess they are all the way in the back. The reason why they are here is to tell the story of what's going on in Paraguay.

I hope the discussions you engage in during your time together can open up new opportunities and inspire new possibilities of how these respective nations, and the resources they bring, can help fuel the potential that is Paraguay.

I have written a speech, but I'm going to go off my speech now, because I was impressed by our Paraguayan counterparts, especially with this new administration in terms of the direction they want to think about in development, and, of course, some of the comments that our Korean guests have made. So, I would like to conclude by offering some of my thoughts.

I think for our Korean guests, they should not look at Paraguay as a nation alone, but as one of the nations that make up the region of South America. The value of Paraguay is as a hub, for industrialization, distribution, and all the service fields that support that activity. If you look at Latin America, with the new

thrust that this new administration is bringing, building a business-friendly environment, a tax-friendly environment, a trade-friendly environment, it becomes an obvious choice for multi-nationals to build and invest industrial complexes that can service not only the Paraguayan market, but the entire Latin American market. Already what is happening is that a lot of the agricultural industry in Brazil is moving into Paraguay, and so there is actually a greater integration and cooperation on a business level. This goes one step down below trade agreements within this region. There is a greater consolidation that's actually happening right now, and Paraguay sits in a tremendously opportune and advantageous position.

I hope that, not only our Korean partners but others as well, could recognize that the potential of Paraguay does not come just in its natural resources, natural markets and indigenous markets, but more importantly, as a hub for the entire Latin American market. I think it is going to be obvious when you research how it is like, in terms of the environment, for investment, for business, in terms of taxes and regulations, etc., in its neighboring countries. I would like to emphasize that point.

For the Paraguayans, however, you are on the right track, and I would encourage you and this administration. One of the reasons why I helped to start this think tank was to build a consistent road map so that subsequent administrations will carry on these good policies that will make Paraguay an ongoing partner for investment and development. Then, I believe that by the end of this Cartes administration, this nation is going to be a different nation. I believe that if subsequent administrations carry this road map, Paraguay will far surpass your 2030 Plan.

One of the reasons why Korea is such a good partner for Paraguay is because it is a modern miracle. The nation of Korea transformed itself in 50 years. Within one century, Korea went from a feudal society into a modern industrial state. In terms of the experiences of developed nations of the world today, no nations that I know of have had such an accelerated growth, and have raised the standard of living of its citizens, as Korea has.

One of the things that I've noticed as I travel around the world is that many nations are looking for models or precedents to follow. The past-existing paradigm of the Western model of development has been considered to be the European experience or the U.S. experience. But I think now, in the 21st century, the landscape is starting to change. Especially many developing nations are starting to think, "Look at all the problems that those nations are having. Are there other models of development that we should follow?" I think this is really where Korea can shine.

Korea is the leader in terms of high-technology companies. I know Samsung was mentioned here, and also, one of the top five largest car companies is also in Korea. This is because Korea had a plan in terms of how they wanted to develop, and I think Paraguay can learn tremendously from this experience. You don't need to go through the basic, unplanned type of growth process that many of the developed Western nations follow. You could have a clear plan, and you can start seeing transformations leap-frogging past the development that other Western nations took.

I believe the models that Latin American countries should look to for development is actually in Asia, because that's where the quickest growth actually came about, and I think Korea is a stellar example of this. And of course, because I'm Korean, and I'm also a Paraguayan, I'm your adopted son, it brings joy to my heart that these two nations are coming together. Paraguay and Latin America has what Korea needs. Korea is a peninsular nation, it's resource-poor. Latin America is a resource-rich region, but it does not have the industry, the technology, and the professional capabilities that Korea has.

Being a man of faith, I don't think things happen by chance. I've always believed that Paraguay was the "womb" of Latin America. This nation, at one time, was considered the basket case of Latin America. The reason why I came to Paraguay in 2008 was out of crisis. And yet, look how much this nation has changed. I've seen this nation go through three administrations, from Nicanor to Cartes. I've seen you tackle fundamental issues on whether or not you will be a democratic state or not, and you passed that trial. You stayed true to the principles upon which successful democracies are built: recognition of human rights, recognition of private property; and look where you came to now.

This is an inflection moment in the history of this nation. For all you business leaders gathered here today, this is a time in which you should be acting bold for the sake of this nation Paraguay. Work with our Korean partners, and build a new tomorrow for this nation, your families, and the regions of Latin America.