

**STEAR Annual Conference, 6 November 2021**

**"The Future of Asia-Europe Relations in the Post COVID-19 World"**

**Speech by Amb Toru MORIKAWA**

**Executive Director of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)**

Distinguished participants,

Welcome to the First Annual Virtual Conference of the Student Think Tank For Europe-Asia Relations, "The Future of Asia-Europe Relations in the Post Covid-19 World."

Warm Greetings from Singapore, I am Toru MORIKAWA, Executive Director of Asia-Europe Foundation, ASEF. I would like to start my remark by commending all the Asian and European young leaders of STEARS for the vision, the leadership and the dedication to realize today's conference, It is a great honor for me to be among you to congratulate you for convening this important event. This conference would be one of the major intellectual exchanges between Asia and Europe in this autumn with the participation of eminent personalities and experts in different areas.

ASEF is the sole permanent institution in the Asia-Europe Meeting Process, ASEM, a dialog process of Head of States and Government and Ministers of 51 Asian and European countries plus EU and ASEAN. Our mission is to enhance the intellectual, cultural and people-to-people exchange between our two regions. Among our different projects, we attach a particular importance to enhance the exchange between Asian and European young leaders.

ASEM will soon convene the 13<sup>th</sup> Leaders' Summit hosted by the Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia later in this month. In this light, I would like to congratulate STEARS that it is very timely and pertinent to convene the annual conference on the theme, "the future of Asia-Europe Relations in the post covid19 world" today and tomorrow.

Distinguished participants,

COVID 19 has changed the world a lot. So many lives were lost, the economic and social life and the people to people to exchange were largely disrupted. While the tremendous dedication by front line workers, experts, governments, IOs, civil society have made our life take a first step to back to the normal, but there is still a long way to go and the world will not be the same as before the pandemic. In addition, it is often said that the pandemic has made the existing chronic problems, such as environmental issues including climate change and issues around digitalization, unchanged or even more serious.

The concerted efforts by the international community based on more intense communication is more and more important. The coming ASEM13 Summit will address how we shape and cooperate toward the post covid19 world.

In this vein, I would like to emphasize the importance of this conference in three aspects. As I returned to Singapore yesterday evening from COP26 in Glasgow, I may take some examples from Climate Change issues.

First, it is about Asia-Europe partnership. Europe continues to be one of the most active source of the values and the innovative solutions for the pressing issues like climate change. Asia is one of the most fast growing regions to the extent that it can be a strong equal partner for Europe. For example, Asia and Europe can work together through the equal partnership how to address the climate change while responding to a rapidly increasing energy demand in Asia. How to shape the Asia-Europe partnership would be clearer by the continuous discussions by Asians and Europeans through the tireless dialog efforts such as today's STEARS conference.

Second, more than ever, we need the intellectual exchanges like the one done by STEARS. It is unfortunately true that it is becoming more and more difficult for the people who have different ideas to communicate and cooperate each other, ironically, one of the reasons for it/ is the digitalization. People tend to see what is in line with their idea, rather than to know the different ideas. We need to accelerate our efforts to communicate each other to bridge the different ideas, as we need a cooperation by all to address the urgent issues like climate change or pandemic, and to navigate through the uncertain world after the covid19.

Third, it is because done by you, young leaders of the future generations of Asia and Europe. In your lifetime, the population of the planet will reach 10 billion. The necessary energy and resource for each person will also grow to realize the better quality of life for everybody. It means that the demand for energy and resource by the entire human being may grow even faster. The challenge is huge but I believe that the intellectual network of young leaders in Asia and Europe and beyond such as STEARS can contribute to find solutions to it. Today's 1<sup>st</sup> annual conference of STEARS is the important stepstone toward the future.

Distinguished participants, I close my congratulatory remark by wishing you all, a lively discussion and a fruitful exchanges over the two days sessions on different themes for the common future of Asia and Europe and beyond.

Thank you so much.