

**MESSAGE FROM ROBERTA A. SCALAPINO ON THE
OCCASION OF THE INAUGURATION OF THE
ULAANBAATAR FORUM FOR EAST ASIA**

This is a most appropriate time to launch a forum on East Asia in Mongolia. Mongolia's connections with, and interests in the Asia-Pacific region are steadily expanding. Further, this is a truly revolutionary era for the region, with multiple changes taking place at an accelerating speed.

Asia today must contend with three semi-conflictual forces: internationalism, nationalism, and communalism. Internationalism is rapidly expanding in a variety of ways. ASEAN, ASEAN Plus Three, ARF, ASEM, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and most recently, the East Asian Summit testify to the proliferation of international organizations in this region in recent decades. Yet for the most part, the achievements of these bodies have been to bring national leaders together to discuss on-going issues, with progress chiefly in the economic arena, and even here, somewhat limited. Major differences in stage of development, political system, and culture have made meaningful strategic and political achievements difficult.

Yet on other fronts, internationalism has probably been more meaningful. Informal groups of three, four, or six nations focusing on a specific issue or set of issues have become increasingly important. Further, the power of internationalism at the non-governmental level is illustrated by the advancing ties between and among private economic entities and the growing impact of foreign cultures upon various nations. This is an age when national boundaries are being penetrated by a variety of sources.

At the same time, nationalism is also in the ascendancy in most Asia-Pacific nations, and creating tensions in some cases, especially in Northeast Asia. The decline of ideology in China has been matched by the rise of Chinese nationalism. Japan, after sixty years of secondary status in international circles, is seeking the status of a major power. In the Republic of Korea as well as in Southeast Asia, nationalism has become a more potent force. The challenge in many cases is to use nationalism but also to control its excesses.

Finally, the quest of individuals for a more meaningful, intimate status in this revolutionary age often takes the form of closer identification with religion, ethnicity, or one's local community—forms of communalism. These quests can lead to separatism, or challenges to the national sovereignty.

How nations deal with these three forces will go far in determining their stability and capacity for development. Thus, for Mongolia to probe as deeply as possible the current trends in the region of which it is a part, and to interact on an informal as well as formal basis with neighbouring individuals and governments is of critical importance.

In recent times, Mongolia has sought to make major changes in its past economic and political policies. It is currently committed to a market-oriented economy and to a democratic political order. To achieve these goals is not easy, as some recent events have shown. Yet on balance, Mongolia is to be congratulated for the economic and political strides it has made amidst many impediments, with the hope that those gains will continue.

Meanwhile, Mongolia's geopolitical position is unique. It is a nation small in population, large in territory, positioned between two major powers. It would seem in Mongolia's national interest to seek balanced, positive relations with China and Russia while also achieving a closer relationship with Japan and the United States. Moreover, if Mongolia is to achieve greater understanding internationally, it must make its needs and aspirations better known to those with whom it seeks to interact, especially the educated elites as well as the political community. Thus, the tasks - and opportunities - afforded to this Forum are truly important.