On June 30, 2009, Asia Society Korea Center held its first year anniversary dinner at the Lotte Hotel Seoul’s Sapphire Ballroom. Nearly 200 guests attended the event, including H.E. Kathleen Stephens, the U.S. Ambassador to Seoul, and Susan Shirk, Director of the Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation (IGCC) at the University of California, San Diego and former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State during the Clinton Administration. The event was attended by a cross section of national and international figures such as the former South Korean Prime Ministers Lho Shin-Young and Lee Hong Koo, National Assembly Member Ryan Jung Wook Hong and Mr. H.S. (Hyun Sang) Cho, Executive Vice President of the Hyosung Group and the Chairman of the Asia 21 Korea Chapter. (see page 3)

The Asia 21 Korea Chapter (K21) has continued to expand extensively since its founding in 2006. Over the summer, nine new members have been selected and have joined the Chapter. With its devotion and contribution to public service and education for migrant workers in South Korea, K21 will continue to reach out to fulfill its initiatives for valuable cooperation and networks for the society.

Asia Society Korea Center Turns 1

Save the Date

Tuesday, December 8

Asia Society Korea Center
Annual Christmas Dinner

K21 News

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Mr. Nobuyoshi Sakajiri, Senior Diplomatic Correspondent of the China General Bureau of Asahi Shimbun and Asia Society’s Bernard Schwartz Fellow, addressed Asia Society Korea Center’s audience about the “Past, Present and Future of the Six-Party Talks” for the luncheon series gathering in May. As a correspondent who has covered all the rounds of the six-party talks in Beijing since August 2003, he presented specifics on the current issues revolving around governmental discussions, while reviewing the past experiences faced by these countries and the potential for progress with challenges for the future of multilateral diplomatic relations.

Nobuyoshi Sakajiri has been a senior diplomatic correspondent at the China General Bureau of Asahi Shimbun since September 2005. He joined the Asahi Shimbun in 1989. In 1994 he was selected to participate in the Asahi Shimbun’s foreign-language training program. After a year of Chinese studies at the University of Sichuan, China, he was assigned to cover Hong Kong from 1996 to 1998, before and after its handover to China. In Tokyo, he served as a staff reporter at the Foreign News Department and for two years also covered social security matters in Japan.

H.E. Edmundo Sussumu Fujita, Ambassador of Brazil to the Republic of Korea, was guest speaker on the topic of “The Future of Brazil-Korea Relations in a Global World” for the Asia Society Korea Center’s July Luncheon. Ambassador Fujita spoke about the important bilateral issues facing both nations in current times and the potential for developing this relationship in multi-faceted ways through further interaction and understanding.

Ambassador Fujita was born in São Paulo, Brazil, from a family that emigrated from Japan almost 100 years ago to South and North America. He was the first Brazilian of Asian origin to pass through the competitive exams to enter the exclusive Foreign Service, in 1975. He has since been posted to London, Tokyo, Moscow and New York, where he was alternate representative to the Security Council. He served as Ambassador to Indonesia from 2005 to 2009, before coming to Seoul.

H.E. Eamonn McKee, Ambassador of Ireland to the Republic of Korea, presented the audience at the August luncheon with a unique title to arouse the curiosity of many, “How Irish are the Koreans?” As a recently arrived foreigner to Seoul, he proceeded with an analysis of similarities between the cultures of Ireland and Korea that included the belief in the power of the spoken word and a long tradition of oratory and oral performance. He further added the rebel instinct, intolerance of pomposity and being more emotional than their neighboring countries as commonalities.

On the other hand, Ambassador McKee moved onto explain his perspectives on the differences between the Irish and the Koreans, which centered on the fact that Korea’s colonization and the trauma of war occurred in more recent times than Ireland, and therefore, the recovery that much more remarkable.

On the issue of language, Koreans had been fortunate to return to their native tongue once colonization ended, whereas the use of Irish Gaelic in Ireland is limited to certain areas of the country, and is not the main use of commerce. On the flip side, Ireland is able to benefit as an English speaking nation by fully using the language that was once imposed by its colonizers. Ambassador McKee also commented on the enormous amount of resources, time, money and energy that is consumed by countries, such as South Korea and Ireland, which experience partition, missed potential and opportunities.
Asia Society Korea Center celebrated its first year anniversary on June 30, 2009 and held a dinner event to commemorate the successes and progress from initiatives and ventures that were taken after its inauguration on April 2, 2008. Since the founding of the Korea Center, it has conducted 21 high-profile programs and events in policy, business, journalism, art and culture, and hosted nearly 2,000 guests. With the mission to embark on new programmatic initiatives that would strengthen ASKC’s profile as a Center of Excellence within the global Asia Society organization, this event marked the Korea Center’s commitment to the region, adding another important piece to the institution’s evolving global identity.

H.E. Kathleen Stephens, the U.S. Ambassador to Seoul, gave the congratulatory speech centered on parallel comparisons with the joint vision for the alliance of the Republic of Korea and the United States that was announced during President Lee Myung-Bak’s official visit to meet with President Barak Obama in June 2009. Ambassador Stephens emphasized the continued deepening of bilateral relations, as well as building even closer ties between both societies, civic, cultural, academic, and other institutions, corresponding to ASKC’s current initiatives.

Dr. Lho Kyongsoo, Co-Chairman of the Korea Center and Professor of International Politics at Seoul National University, gave an overview of the Korea Center’s current programs, future projects and upcoming challenges to the audience.

Ms. Yvonne Kim, the Korea Center’s Executive Director, further provided the attendees with specific details on the initiatives pursued and to be undertaken and developed by the center, which included enhancing membership presence and partnership development. Furthermore, she emphasized the focus on close partnership with Asia Society’s New York office to further strategic goals. The Vietnam Conference was raised as an important opportunity to bring together senior government and business leaders from Vietnam and Korea to review and deepen their bilateral relations. The Asia 21 Korea Chapter or K21, was described as a special group of dynamic young leaders whose overarching goal is to develop collaborative approaches to shared challenges and to build the necessary networks of trust while fostering the highest ideals of value-based leadership.

Global media presence included the BBC and CNN news agencies in addition to the numerous local news agencies.

Scholarship Initiative
Asia Society Korea Center and the Seoul Global Center have jointly initiated a scholarship for the low-to-middle class children and teenagers from multicultural families in Seoul, who are facing challenges in acquiring Korean language proficiency, as they are without socio-economic conditions that permit their entry into international schools. The initiative will take place in the 2010-11 academic year.

Many elementary and middle school students growing up in multicultural families in Korea force an identity crisis while trying to adapt to and understand Korean society. This conflict of cultures is a difficult and challenging time for the students. The scholarship aims to encourage understanding of multicultural families and broaden partnerships within the current Korean society.

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