

U.S. COMMITMENT TO ASIA-PACIFIC COOPERATION REMAINS STRONG

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WASHINGTON, DECEMBER 12 -- The United States remains strongly committed to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum and envisions an inclusive Asia-Pacific region that "bridges the four continents of Asia, Australia, and the Americas," says Michael Michalak, the senior U.S. official for APEC.

The ultimate goal of U.S. activities in APEC is "to advance the prosperity and security of the region and improve business's bottom line," Michalak said during a December 7 speech to members of the Asia Society in Washington, the Council of the Americas and the U.S.-APEC Business Coalition.

Specifically, the United States' four key goals in APEC are trade and investment liberalization, enhancing security, preparing for and preventing pandemic diseases, and improving the region's business environment, he said.

Vietnam hosted the 21 member economies of APEC in Hanoi in November. There President Bush announced that the United States would double its support of APEC activities to roughly \$5 million per year, starting in 2007.

In Hanoi, Michalak said, APEC members successfully endorsed six sets of free-trade agreement model measures to act as important references and to ensure transparency, cooperation, ways to deal with technical barriers to trade, government procurement, market access and dispute settlement. "This effort is one way in which APEC has been responding to increasing regional economic integration," he observed.

He also said that APEC continues to place a high premium on protecting intellectual property rights (IPR) in the region, an enormously important sector for U.S. business. According to Michalak, APEC ministers and leaders welcomed the completion of two new IPR model guidelines under the 2005 APEC Anti-Counterfeiting and Piracy Initiative. Ministers and leaders also agreed that government agencies "should be setting a good example by prohibiting the use of illegal software and on government computer systems and via the Internet," he said. (See Protecting Intellectual Property Rights (http://usinfo.state.gov/ei/economic_issues/intellectual_property.html).)

In the area of human security, Michalak said that APEC leaders "condemned terrorist acts that have struck the region and reiterated their determination to 'combat terrorism in every form and manifestation.'" Leaders also called for action to protect commercial and financial sectors against abuse by proliferators of weapons of mass destruction, he said. (See Response to Terrorism (http://usinfo.state.gov/is/international_security/terrorism.html).)

In addition, APEC members made "significant strides" toward facilitating travel in the region, Michalak said, noting that as of November 19 the United States recognizes the APEC Business Travel Card (ABTC), which allows card holders to receive expedited processing at U.S. international airports via crew lanes.

"Travelers, except those from Visa Waiver Program countries, will still require a valid visa," Michalak explained. "However, ABTC cardholders will be eligible for expedited appointment scheduling for visas at U.S. embassies and consulates."

Regarding pandemic diseases, ministers endorsed an action plan that calls on economies to implement individual and collective programs aimed at reducing the threat of, preparing for and mitigating the effects of an influenza pandemic, Michalak said. (See Health (http://usinfo.state.gov/gi/global_issues/health.html).

In an effort to improve the region's business environment, APEC leaders and ministers reaffirmed their strong commitment to fight corruption in the region by agreeing to prosecute acts of corruption by high-level officials, Michalak said. "Ministers agreed to encourage economies to develop domestic actions to deny safe haven to corrupt officials and prevent them and those who bribe public officials from accessing the fruits of their kleptocratic activities in the financial systems." (See Bribery and Corruption (http://usinfo.state.gov/ei/economic_issues/bribery_and_corruption.html).

APEC's 21 member economies -- Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Peru, the Philippines, Russia, Singapore, Chinese Taipei (Taiwan), Thailand, the United States and Vietnam -- represent 60 percent of global gross domestic product and roughly 50 percent of world trade.

The organization is the only multilateral forum in the region in which the United States participates at the head-of-state level, according to Michalak. The United States initiated the annual gathering of APEC leaders in 1993. The next APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting will take place in September 2007 in Sydney, Australia.

For more information on U.S. policy, see Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) (http://usinfo.state.gov/eap/east_asia_pacific/apec.html).

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