

2024년 시무식

New Year's Address

January 2, 2024

Minister of Environment
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Ministry of Environment family! The year 2024, the 41st year of the sexagenary cycle, is upon us.

This year is the Year of the Blue Dragon.

May you all be filled with the energy of the Blue Dragon
and may your New Year's wishes come true.

It feels like just yesterday when I was appointed as the Minister of Environment, but time has passed so swiftly. Looking back, the year 2023 was filled with various environmental challenges.

The first things that come to mind are the spring drought and heavy rainfall in the southern regions. Despite efforts to ensure national safety from extreme rainfall and drought by establishing relevant laws and formulating measures for drainage and water supply, it was a heavy and regrettable time as it was difficult to prevent the impact on national safety caused by the heavy rainfall.

On the other hand, we made continuous efforts to fulfill the environmental policies promised to the public in last year's new year annual report by actively engaging with the field and fostering communication.

Efforts were made to boldly innovate environmental regulations that were disconnected from the field, such as chemical substance management and environmental impact assessments, aligning them with global standards. The goal was to ensure national safety, reduce the burden on businesses, and enhance effectiveness.

All of the personnel at the Ministry, including myself, took on the role of green industry sales representatives. Through collaboration with the private sector as one team, we successfully achieved the challenging goal of securing 20 trillion won in green industry contracts and exports.

We actively responded to international environmental issues such as climate change and the plastic agreement. Last August, we successfully hosted the UN Climate Change Adaptation Week, creating the largest platform for discussions on climate change adaptation in history. Additionally, we are planning to host the 5th intergovernmental negotiation meeting for the international plastic agreement this year and the World Environment Day in 2025 in South Korea.

There were some regrets, but over the past year, we have achieved a lot together. I extend my sincerest gratitude to our Ministry of Environment family for your hard work.

Dear beloved Ministry of Environment family!

This year, it seems like it will be a turbulent year with unpredictable conditions. High inflation, global economic slowdown due to high interest rates, and uncertainties in the global resource supply chain are causing significant challenges to our economy and people's livelihoods.

Furthermore, the ongoing climate crises, such as record-breaking floods and droughts, are becoming increasingly common, posing a threat to national safety.

We must proactively respond to the new challenges of economic and climate crises to create opportunities for leaps forward. It is essential to play a versatile role like an all-around player, securing growth momentum while safeguarding national safety and environmental goals simultaneously.

With this in mind, I would like to share the policy directions that should be prioritized this year and collectively establish our determination.

First, we must dedicate ourselves to a grassroots-oriented environmental policy centered on real-world needs,

focusing on improving the quality of life for the people.

Last year, including myself, many senior officials here visited numerous places where people's lives are directly affected. During the spring, we inspected water supply situations on islands suffering from drought. In flood seasons, we checked rivers, dams, and urban flood-prone areas nationwide. We also made efforts to communicate with communities across the country, inspecting environmental safety in vulnerable residential areas affected by heatwaves and cold snaps, as well as in local child facilities.

This year, we especially need to thoroughly examine environmental policies that are closely related to people's lives. By listening to the voices of various groups such as local communities, businesses, experts, civil society, and youth, we should ensure that there are no blind spots in environmental welfare. We must also pay attention to whether environmental regulations are hindering sustainable development and failing to achieve their original objectives. It is crucial to listen to the voices from the field and promptly incorporate them into our policies.

Furthermore, we must boldly break down barriers within the Ministry and between ministries. By closely cooperating on agendas such as water management and carbon neutrality, let's create tangible changes that the public can actually experience.

Second, we need to unfold environmental policies that prioritize the safety and lives of the people as the utmost value.

Let's resume dam construction and riverbank development that had been interrupted over the past decade to proactively address the ongoing climate crisis. Additionally, please continue the implementation of the drainage measures established last year, incorporating digital technology for faster and more accurate flood forecasting.

To enable the public to enjoy a more pleasant daily life free from fine dust, we should focus on improving air quality in close living spaces such as residential areas, activity areas for vulnerable groups, and major transportation hubs. Activate a swift communication channel for the respiratory community between Korea and China, requesting urgent measures from China in high-density fine dust situations. Strengthen cooperation between the two countries.

Furthermore, with the difficult passage through the standing committee of the National Assembly at the end of last year of the proposed amendments to the Chemical Substance Registration and Evaluation Act and the Chemical Substance Management Act, which lacked effectiveness due to uniform regulatory approaches, we must now take seamless follow-up measures to enhance national safety and international competitiveness.

Third, we must provide high-quality environmental services and warm environmental welfare that the public can actually experience.

In accordance with the 5th National Biodiversity Strategy established last year, we must uphold the firm goal of expanding excellent natural resources while returning more benefits to the public from the blessings of nature. Additionally, efforts should be made to integrate biodiversity values into various aspects of society, including strengthening support to expand corporate biodiversity ESG management.

Meanwhile, with the amendments to the Act on the Management of Zoos and Aquariums and the Wildlife Protection and Management Act at the end of last year, we need to ensure that new systems such as zoo permits are well-implemented on-site. By doing so, let's work towards creating a society where both humans and wildlife can coexist happily.

We also need to meticulously examine the blind spots in environmental welfare. Ensuring that there are no blind spots in water welfare between regions and social strata, we must manage areas ranging from rural and mountainous regions to frontline areas. Efforts should be made to create conditions where more citizens can conveniently receive environmental health benefits, such as tailored environmental health services for vulnerable groups like children and a one-stop service for resolving environmental disputes and compensating for damages with a single application.

Fourth, as a global central nation in the era of climate change, we must lead the way towards a carbon-neutral and circular economy society.

At the 28th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28), the international community agreed to transition away from fossil fuels for carbon neutrality and pledged to accelerate climate action.

This year, it is crucial to responsibly fulfill the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) committed to the international community by 2030. Through productive discussions with various stakeholders, including relevant ministries, experts, industries, and youth, let's actively pursue the development of a rational 2035 NDC based on science and technology.

Furthermore, through the expansion of Green ODA, we should play a leading role in the international community and contribute to achieving domestic NDCs by linking with international emission reduction projects. At the same time, we need to actively support our businesses in responding to the increasing international carbon trade barriers, such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism and the mandatory global environmental disclosure. This can be achieved through close consulting, support for emission reduction facilities, and technology adoption, strengthening the national carbon competitiveness.

Starting this year, the Act on the Promotion of Transition to a Circular Economy and Society will be fully implemented. To enhance the security of the supply chain for key raw materials, there should be concentrated support for recycling industries such as used batteries. Additionally, support should be provided for the swift introduction of relevant new technologies into the field through regulatory sandboxes and other means.

Furthermore, we should actively participate in the discussions for the establishment of the international plastic agreement and strengthen the entire lifecycle management of plastics, including production, consumption, and disposal, to build a foundation for domestic implementation.

Lastly, we must expand the overseas expansion of green industries and promote domestic consumption and the establishment of an ecosystem within the green industry.

If last year was laying the foundation for the overseas expansion of green industries, this year should focus on further expanding and adding more value to the outreach of green industry exports. This will contribute to the growth of domestic green industries and the expansion of domestic consumption.

Let's diversify our export routes by expanding collaboration with green industry partner countries. Strategically support the overseas expansion of our green businesses by exploring green projects that consider local demand, connected with Green ODA, and broadening the scope of collaboration.

Moreover, for fostering domestic green businesses, we should expand regional hub green convergence clusters. Utilize cross-government investment support like green bonds and funds. Utilize newly established funds such as the Green Export Fund this year to strengthen the foundation of the green industry ecosystem, linking it

with entrepreneurship, business development, on-site verification, and export expansion.

Especially, we should provide young people with opportunities for the future and new job opportunities in the green industry, such as expanding support for youth entrepreneurship and small and medium-sized green businesses.

Dear Ministry of Environment family!

2024 marks the 30th anniversary since the elevation of the Environmental Agency to the Ministry of Environment. Over the past 30 years, the Ministry has developed significantly both quantitatively and qualitatively. The expectations and responsibilities placed on the Ministry by the public are equally substantial.

In the past era of industrialization, within the context of a growth-focused policy, the role of the Ministry was limited to passive responses. However, in the era of climate change, we are transforming into a proactive ministry leading the global carbon-neutral order. Environmental values such as green industries, ESG, and the circular economy are guiding changes in both the economy and society.

For the Ministry to meet the growing expectations of the people and fulfill its responsibilities, and for a 2024 where environmental values are elevated and the lives of our citizens improve, we should move forward together with warm environmental administration.

Happy New Year!

Thank you.