



Environment and Development of China: Opportunities and Challenges

Keynote speech at CCICED 20th Anniversary Forum

Qu Geping, Former Chairperson of Environment Protection and Resources Conservation Committee, National People's Congress; Former Administrator of National Environmental Protection Agency; Vice Chairperson of CCICED Phase I, II and III

Members, ladies and gentlemen,

I am very happy to attend CCICED 20th Anniversary Forum today and share with all old and new friends the advancement of the environment and development of China over the past 20 years as well as the future opportunities and challenges.

The Chinese Government approved the establishment of the China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development (hereinafter referred to as CCICED) two months before the Rio UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992. CCICED held its First Annual general Meeting on April 19, 1992. This marks the new stage of environment and development progress of China and its synchronization with international pace in this field.

I. China sets up important policy discussion platform under a grave environmental situation

The 1980s and 1990s was a period of rapid development of township enterprises, increasing environmental pollution in some regions, acceleration of industrial development, fast growth of resource consumption and a preeminent environmental pollution problem. The environmental situation of China is very serious due to the development of pollution from point sources to linear and non-point sources. The Rio Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 called for the establishment of a global partnership for the achievement of sustainable development and the assistance from developed countries to



help developing countries solve their problems and conflicts in environment and development. Therefore, whether it's large scale control of environmental pollution or exploration of sustainable development at a higher level, China urgently needs comprehensive learning from international communities and international intellectual support; this was the practical requirement for the establishment of CCICED. Meanwhile, environmental cooperation to some extent was the first area of China that opened to the outside world for international cooperation. Even if there exist difficulties in some foreign cooperation programs in other fields, environmental cooperation usually suffers little impact and plays an important role in maintaining the overall cooperation relations. Against this backdrop, the Chinese Government established the "China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development".

The establishment of CCICED has played a very important role in the progression of China's environment and development, which is a key measure of China for improving environmental awareness and capacity in developing environmental policies. An international workshop on development of Hainan in 1991 gave me inspiration; it would be a good idea if China set up an international forum on environmental cooperation where the leaders of China and relevant departments could listen to foreign experience in environment and development and recommendations on environment and development to facilitate coordinated development of China, this would no doubt remedy our deficiencies in knowledge and experience. I firstly discussed this idea with State Councilor Mr. Song Jian, who voiced active support. Then I discussed it with our international friend Mr. Martin Lees and worked out the specific program. Later, Premier Li Peng showed his support without any hesitations about this forum when he listened to the briefings.

CCICED is composed of famous experts at home and abroad as well as the leaders of relevant departments. The Chairman of CCICED Phase I was State Councilor Song Jian. The Chairman of CCICED Phase II was Mr. Wen Jiabao, Vice Premier at that time. The Chairman of CCICED Phase III was Vice Premier Zeng Peiyan. I took the post of CCICED Vice Chairman from Phase I to Phase III. Over the past years, CCICED has carried out studies in areas such as environment and development, energy and environment, control of environmental pollution, development and ecological conservation in West China, resource valuation, conservation of biodiversity, environment and trade, circular economy, eco-compensation mechanism, public participation and environmental governance and put forward policy recommendations to the Chinese Government. Each year, the Premier of the State Council listens in person to the policy recommendations of CCICED and answers the questions of Members. Sometimes the President, Chairman of NPC Standing Committee



and NPPCC Chairman would listen to the recommendations of CCICED Members, too. Serving as a high-level think tank for democratic, scientific and comprehensive decision making by the Chinese Government, CCICED has made important contributions to the environmental protection and sustainable development cause of our country.

II. In terms of development history, we must keep on learning about advanced international experience in environment and development

The establishment of the unique institution of CCICED not only receives active appreciation by the Chinese Government, but also generates wide influence in international communities. At the end of the Third Phase of CCICED after 15 years, there was a question of whether or not CCICED should continue. When listening to the policy recommendations of Chinese and international experts on November 10, 2006, Premier Wen Jiabao clearly noted that CCICED should keep its long-term existence until the international community is satisfied with the environmental protection cause of our country. Today when CCICED Phase IV is going to finish its term, we are again at the key time and face the same question. To answer this question requires careful review and examination on our environmental protection work according to the above instruction of Premier Wen Jiabao. That is, are international communities satisfied with the environmental protection cause of our country? Are Chinese people satisfied? The answer is quite clear: although we have made great efforts in environmental protection, with the world's most complicated environmental problem, we are facing difficult and intertwining problems, strong public demands for good environmental quality, mounting pressure from international communities and unprecedented challenges due to concentrated outbursts of environmental problems in the past 30 years in our country, which in developed countries happened during the past several hundred years..

In terms of understanding and strategy of environmental protection, China has developed and “carried out the strategy of synchronized planning, implementation and development in terms of economic, urban and rural development and environmental protection (three synchronizations principle)” as early as the 1980s. In the 1990s, China put forward the strategies such as sustainable development, and the development of a resource-saving and environment-friendly society and green economy. However, all these strategies lack a relevant institution and policy mechanism as well as a supervision mechanism.

Now, the environmental protection input of China as percent of GDP reaches the level of OECD. However, current environmental input of OECD countries is against the

backdrop of completion of industrialization and urbanization, balance of industrial structure and dominance of the service industry, whereas China is just at the stage of accelerated industrialization and urbanization with still a dominance of heavy and chemical industry in industrial structure. This shows that although there is similar investment in environmental protection, we have big differences in the severity of environmental problem confronting us.

In terms of actual outcomes of environmental protection, China has done a lot in adjusting industrial structure, controlling pollution and improving the environment over the past 30 years. But we still face a serious environmental situation and ecological degradation has not been under control due to our stage of development. The statement on environmental situation in the early 1980s was: “degradation of the overall environment with control in some regions and worrying prospects”. The assessment of the environmental situation in the Macro Strategy for Environment of China in 2010 was: “the overall situation has not been under effective control, is still grave, and receiving increasing pressure, although there is certain improvement in some regions”. Comparing the above two statements, we can clearly understand that we are facing more pressure. The report on Macro Strategy for Environment of China involving the Chinese Academy of Engineering Science and Ministry of Environmental Protection as well as many senior experts and scholars also points out: “Some environmental quality indicators of our country enjoy continuous improvement, however, the overall environmental situation is still serious with many difficulties and challenges.”

The serious situation shows that there is no simple solution to the environmental problems of China, and these challenges will last at least 20 years. However, China’s environment and development in the future will face both crisis and many opportunities. CCICED no doubt plays a vital role in helping China seize these opportunities.

China quickly accepted the idea of green development over the past few years with particular attention to green economy, low carbon economy, circular economy and eco-compensation and at the same time, it is striving to mainstream the environment into economic decision making. These mark good trends in China in addressing the fundamental and systematic problems. In his speech on December of 2010, Vice Premier Li Keqiang points out: “The transformation of economic structure of our country is speeding up with increasing constraint of resources and environment, it becomes a trend to develop green economy”. At the Davos World Economic Forum and the CCICED Annual General Meeting, he also said that China will pay high attention to environmental protection, high energy efficiency and innovation of emission reduction technologies in its industrial restructuring. These speeches of leaders of China demonstrate China’s commitment to the agendas that



are included in CCICED policy recommendations to the State Council. These remarks also point out the direction of CCICED future activities; i.e. paying attention to the policies facilitating the development of green economy, or “green transformation”. The progression of environment and development of China has been upgraded from learning the experience of developing countries in environmental governance to a higher and more comprehensive level where China and international communities jointly facilitate green transition and green growth of global economy. As the core institution guiding long-term progress of China’s environment and development, CCICED will meet greater opportunities in the future.

III. CCICED should play a greater role in the environment and development progress of China

The cause of environmental problems in China still lies in its extensive economic growth mode and improper decision making and administration by the government. Therefore, we must carry out more active policy measures with a vision. Starting from the past three policies and eight systems, environmental policy has been raised its position in national policies with the establishment of a guiding principle of synchronized development, which marks the gradual maturation of environmental management of our country from idea to practice. However, the problems in front of us are more complicated and involving wider fields compared with those in the past. The key to addressing environmental problems lies in the economic development area and in the government decision making and management process. This requires our absorption of internationally advanced experience to meet the challenges based on real conditions of China to a greater extent. Our future tasks will be more difficult, the complexity of environment and development issues will present new and higher requirements for CCICED as an important institution. Based on past experience, we must follow the international trend of environment and development and facilitate green development of China.

As I said in the past, CCICED is a “window” and sets an example for environmental cooperation in the world. In the future, this window will open more areas. CCICED is a “bridge” that links China to other countries in the world, government to civil society and department to department. In the future, this bridge will not only link each party, but also bring the strength of all stakeholders to contribute to green development of China and the world. CCICED is a “platform” that creates good conditions for an open and candid exchange of comments and suggestions among Chinese and international experts on environment and development issues. In the future, this platform will not only facilitate the study of environment and development issues by Chinese and international experts, but also



become an important arena promoting exchanges on environment and development among all countries.

The Chinese Government has officially approved the establishment of the CCICED Phase V; this no doubt is the best answer. I wish that CCICED will obtain more achievements and make greater contributions to sustainable development of both China and the whole world.

Thank you all!