

AKS CHAIRMAN'S REPORT for 2009

1. I am pleased to report to the Annual General Meeting that the Society had another successful year in 2009. The success was due to the introduction of some new events, the continuing support of our sponsors, Diageo, Hyundai and Samsung, the generous assistance provided by the Korean Embassy and the Korean Cultural Centre and the hard work and commitment of Committee members.

2. The Society's events programme has continued to grow and 2009 has seen the introduction of some innovative events. The most prestigious of these was the "Korea Update" held in the House of Commons on 26 March. Also known as the "Four Ambassadors Briefing", this event sought to bring together the UK Ambassadors at Seoul and Pyongyang and the Ambassadors of both the ROK and DPRK to the Court of St James. This event was a great success, though at the last minute, a family bereavement prevented the UK Ambassador to Pyongyang attending. Around 130 people, including MPs and guests of the Society attended. The event was "special", possibly unique in bringing together both Korean ambassadors in London to speak on the same platform. The event was helpful in a small measure in increasing understanding of the political realities of the Korean peninsula and helpful in raising the profile of the Society. All who participated and attended found the event valuable. The Society hopes to repeat the event in July of this year.

3. The second innovation this year has been the introduction of "AKS Diners". These are informal "get togethers" of members and friends over a simple Korean meal. They are held on a bi-monthly basis. Attendance has been good and these "diners" fill a gap in the Society's programme, which allows members to meet up outside of the major events.

4. In 2009 our core programme of four key events continued to attract strong attendance.

- The AGM held on 11 February was well attended and the Society was grateful to the Director of the Korean Cultural Centre for allowing the Society to use the Centre for this event.
- Our tourism and culture event took the form of presentations on Korea's Cultural Legacy and was held on 16 June in the KCC
- Our Chuseok dinner on 17 September was a vibrant and much enjoyed evening.
- But the triumph of the year was the annual House of Commons dinner, held on 8 October. This was the largest and best attended ever and was hosted by Frank Cook MP. Over 140 people enjoyed the evening at which Ambassador Chun Yung-woo updated us on a wide range of Korean issues.

5. The Chairman and Events Secretary called on the North Korean Ambassador Ja Song-nam in April to explain the role of the Society and to offer an open invitation to him and his staff to attend the Society's events. The meeting with Ambassador Ja was cordial but to date neither he, nor his staff have attend any events, although they have requested information about them. Ambassador Ja invited the Chairman and Events Secretary to attend a reception at the North Korean Embassy on the occasion of their National Day. Sylvia Park attended as the Chairman was unable to do so.

6. Also on 29 October we held a joint event with the British Korean Lawyers Association. This was a piano recital by the Korean pianist Ka Hyun Kim. Profits from the event were divided between the building fund for St Vedast Church, the BKLA and the AKS. The evening raised over £200 for the AKS.

7. The Chairman represented the Society at the European conference of the world association of Overseas Korean Trade Associations. Thanks to Dr WS Shin, the Chairman attended the opening dinner and made several useful contacts. Some have been of assistance to the Society subsequently.

8. The Society's website, www.anglokoreansociety.org.uk continues to prove its worth. It receives around 1,000 visits a month. It has raised the profile of the Society and helped to encourage new members. It has led to interesting approaches including the donation of Korean language books for children.

9. The Korean Cultural Centre in London where we are tonight has continued to support the Society by providing a venue both for events and for Committee Meetings. We are grateful to Director Choi, who returned last year to Seoul, and to his successor Director Won Yohggi. We believe that the Society contributes in a helpful way to the Cultural Centre's work. For our part, we are deeply indebted to Directors Choi and Won and their colleagues for their warm welcome and practical support.

10. For technical reasons, the Society did not sponsor any bursaries in 2009 but intends to do so in 2010.

11. We could not have achieved what we did in 2009 without the support of our sponsors. We are deeply grateful to Diageo, Hyundai and Samsung for their sponsorship. This has allowed us both to organise more events and will enable us to provide more bursaries. We aim to renew this year our sponsorship arrangements with all three sponsors.

12. The Korean Embassy has always been generous in its support for the Society and its work in forging closer relations and understanding between the British and Korean people. The Embassy's support is an important gesture of confidence in the Society. We were sad to see the departure of Ambassador Chun Yung-woo and grateful for his vigorous interaction with the Society. Members of the Society attended his farewell reception. We warmly welcome his successor Ambassador Choo Kyu-ho and I am delighted to tell you that he will be attending the reception that follows this AGM. I hope you will all join me and the Committee in making him feel welcome and in demonstrating that we can grow the Society and increase its impact.

13. Thanks to our sponsors and the Korean Embassy's donation last year, the Society is financially comfortable. The membership situation has improved and stands at just under 200. As a result of a renewed membership drive during the year, we added 23 new members and they are still coming in. Obviously the Society will lose a few members each year due to international movements and resignations but this is one of the best years for recruitment in the Society's history. However, the Committee is not complacent and continues to address this issue as a priority but experience shows that the best way to attract new members is through the personal encouragement of existing members. As I have said before, if every existing member were to recruit just one new member, then the Society's position would be greatly strengthened. I encourage you all to do so.

14. On a sad note, I would like to pay tribute to Bill Skillend, who sadly passed away earlier this year. He was a longstanding and stalwart member of the Society who will be well known to many of you. The Society has sent condolences to his son. Also, one longstanding Committee member, Derek Blake, stood down during the year from the Committee. Derek joined the Society in 1978 and served with energy and distinction for many years as Secretary of the Society and Editor of the Bulletin. As a mark of appreciation for his tremendous efforts over so many years, the Committee granted him Life Membership of the Society. I am sure that all members of the Society will welcome and endorse that decision.

15. In closing I would like to thank Ambassador Chun Yung-woo and the Korean Embassy, Directors Choi and Won and the team at the KCC, as well as all our sponsors for their tremendous support in 2009. I would like too to thank all members for supporting events and the AKS Committee for their tireless efforts. All the work essential to make the Society what it is, is provided voluntarily, with Committee members willingly giving up many hours of their time to make the Society a success. Without their efforts, the Society would not exist. I look forward to an exciting and rewarding 2010.

Stephen Brown, Chairman

2 March 2010