Congratulatory Remarks

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American Chemical Society

On behalf of the esteemed organizations assembled here today and the 163,000 members of the American Chemical Society, I'd like to extend our congratulations to the Chemical Society of Japan on its 125th anniversary. I'm honored to be part of this auspicious occasion to celebrate the achievements and contributions of the Society and its members. Japanese scientists have explored the frontiers of knowledge and made scientific and technological advancements that have improved the quality of life of people around the globe.

Aristotle once said, "Wishing to be friends is quick work, but friendship is a slow-ripening fruit." The American Chemical Society and the Chemical Society of Japan share a long, distinguished history of service to our members, our profession and the international community. But the chemistry of friendship also takes the right catalyst, as one of our members recently learned during a trip to Japan.

High school chemistry teacher Karen Deo and her husband were returning on the subway after a day of sightseeing in Kamakura when a young girl of about age 10 approached them. The child bowed and handed Ms. Deo a small seashell, evidently one of her treasures of the day.

Ms. Deo, eager to reciprocate the girl's lovely gesture, rummaged through her bag and found a card-size periodic table of elements. (Teachers often give these handy cards to their students during the American National Chemistry Week.) She offered the card to the girl, who took it with both hands and, looking very perplexed, bowed and returned to her parents and younger sister.

Ms. Deo watched as the girl examined the card and then handed it to her father. His face lit up, and he proceeded to explain to her what the card's contents meant. The girl listened intently and nodded as her father pointed out various elements and explained what they were. Then both father and daughter looked up and gave Ms. Deo a big smile.

Ms. Deo was so moved by this encounter that she shared her story with an American newspaper. She said, "As a teacher and a chemist, it warmed my heart to see the universal language of science in that one small event."

Louis Pasteur observed that science knows no country. The American Chemical Society and the Chemical Society of Japan were founded by a handful of chemists with the same motivations: to stimulate original research, to nurture young talent, to unite chemists in fellowship, and to ensure a better appreciation for chemistry among students and the general public.

More than a century later, technological advances such as the Internet have made it possible for us to nurture a global community of chemists. Together, we are working to encourage collaboration, disseminate research, improve chemical education, and promote public understanding of our science.

The American Chemical Society is pleased to cosponsor the Pacifichem conference with the Chemical Society of Japan and other Pacific Rim chemical societies. Together, we represent the needs and dreams of two-thirds of the world's population. STN International, comprehensive databases in science and technology, is a joint effort of our Society and the Japan Information Center of Science and Technology. A large fraction of our overseas members live in Japan, and from 1996 to 2001, Japanese scientists contributed more research — some 11,000 papers — to our journals than any other country. And just a few days ago, the Green Chemistry Institute cosponsored the first International Conference on Sustainable Chemistry here in Japan.

These partnerships are bearing fruit. For the last three years, Americans and Japanese have shared the Nobel Prize in Chemistry. And even more revealing is the team-oriented and multidisciplinary nature of the winners' work: The discovery of conductive polymers, or the study of chiral molecules and biological macromolecules, would not have been possible without the contributions of chemists, biologists, materials scientists, physicists, and engineers.

In the future, I believe our greatest challenge will be to create a borderless society of science. This is necessary because new innovations will be made between disciplines, not within them.

It's incumbent on chemists to take the lead in fostering this interdisciplinary environment. Chemistry is what we like to call an "enabling" science; without it, most of the things we take for granted — from computers to cans — would not be possible. But first, chemists need a greater understanding of their role in advanced technologies and how their work relates to areas like biology, physics, and engineering.

I know the American Chemical Society and the many assembled here won't face this daunting task alone. I believe that our scientific societies will continue our relationships with bonds as strong as those that hold polymers together. The strength of our resolve will permit us to accomplish together much more than what others working alone can even imagine.

Thank you.