

Eleventh Environment Congress for Asia and the Pacific (ECO ASIA 2003)

Saturday, June 7, 2003

Opening Remarks

Shunichi SUZUKI

Minister of the Environment, Japan

It gives me great pleasure to be able to welcome you today on behalf of the organizers of the Eleventh Environment Congress for Asia and the Pacific, ECO ASIA 2003.

I would like to begin by sincerely thanking the many Environment Ministers of countries from around the Asia-Pacific region, officials of international organizations, and others who have traveled to Japan to participate in the discussions at this Congress. I also wish to thank the members of the National Diet, the environmental specialists, and the representatives of various local organizations who have taken time from their busy schedules to join us.

Our meeting place, Kanagawa Prefecture's Shonan Village, looks out over the blue waters of Sagami Bay and its beautiful coastline and affords us a view of Mt. Fuji, a treasure-house of nature well-known as the symbol of Japan. I am especially pleased that this meeting is being held in Shonan, an area rich in nature with abundant greenery. I thank Governor Matsuzawa of Kanagawa Prefecture, Mayor Sawada of the city of Yokosuka, Mayor Moriya of the town of Hayama, as well as the many others who put so much effort into the preparations for this event.

Since the first Environment Congress for Asia and the Pacific in 1991, the Ministry of the Environment has to date organized ten such Environment Congresses, better known as ECO ASIA. We hold these meetings in order to contribute to sustainable development in the Asia-Pacific region by providing its Environment Ministers and representatives of international organizations with the opportunity to come together and conduct a frank exchange of views.

This eleventh Congress will be taking up the topics of "Efforts toward the Establishment

of a Sustainable Society" and " Specific Implementation of World Summit on Sustainable Development Outcomes " with a view to having a dialog on the issues which should be addressed in the Asia-Pacific region based on the outcomes of the Johannesburg Summit which was convened last year. I look forward to fruitful results emerging from the frank exchange of views among the participants.

We will begin by discussing "Efforts toward the Establishment of a Sustainable Society." If we are to secure a healthy and cultured lifestyle not only now but in the years to come, it is important that we establish a sustainable society, reducing environmental impact by controlling our consumption of natural resources. I believe that it is important for every country to establish sustainable production and consumption patterns by promoting the "3R" approach to sustainable resources: reduce, reuse, and recycle.

The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation adopted in September 2002 calls for every country to set out a ten-year framework for accelerating the shift to sustainable production and consumption patterns. In response to this, the Japanese Cabinet adopted the Basic Law for Establishing the Recycling-based Society in March this year to set numerical targets, including targets for resource productivity, resource recycling ratios, and final waste disposal volumes to promote efforts towards realizing a sustainable society and to assess the degree to which progress has been achieved. The concept of resource productivity is also included in the G8 Action Plan on Science and Technology for Sustainable Development adopted at the recent Evian Summit in France.

In order to achieve these goals, in addition to developing a legal system related to waste and recycling, we are promoting the enhancement of environmental education and learning programs; a shift to a lifestyle with minimal environmental impact through the adequate provision of information; environmentally-sound product design; and the advancement of environmentally-friendly goods and services.

I believe that international cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region is crucial for the establishment of a sustainable society. As economic globalization proceeds, the international transfer of scrap metal, waste plastic and used goods is increasing in this region. It has been noted that the transfer of wastes, including in some cases to countries which do not have sufficient environmental restrictions, may cause environmental damage to those countries. We are well aware of the seriousness of this issue, having

had an incident in which a Japanese waste treatment company was illegally exporting waste to the Philippines. We are determined to further strengthen international cooperation by establishing a network for exchanging information on a day-to-day basis in collaboration with the Basel Convention Asia-Pacific Regional Center as well as accepting trainees from overseas to study waste treatment and recycling systems.

Governor Matsuzawa of Kanagawa Prefecture, Mayor Sawada of the city of Yokosuka, and Mayor Moriya of the town of Hayama will present more detailed information regarding local government initiatives towards a sustainable society a little later.

The establishment of a sustainable society is also imperative in resolving the issue of global warming, a critical problem confronting us at the global level. Japan is engaged in strenuous efforts to reduce its emissions of greenhouse gases, and in March last year adopted new Guidelines on Measures to Prevent Global Warming in order to achieve its Kyoto Protocol commitment of reducing emissions by 6%.

Finding solutions to such global-scale problems requires global-scale participation. I felt this strongly when I attended the Eighth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP8) in October last year. The occasion brought home to me the importance of establishing trust between developed and developing countries. By following up on the initiatives taken by countries of the Asia-Pacific region and reconfirming the importance of international cooperation in implementing those measures, I am certain that at ECO ASIA we will be able to strengthen the trust between developed and developing countries in our efforts to implement global warming countermeasures. I certainly expect that we will be able to expedite global efforts to mitigate global warming.

Moving on to the topic of “ Specific Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development Outcomes, ” I want to stress the importance of follow up to the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation at the Asia-Pacific regional level. Some of the projects we have inaugurated to realize our commitment, such as the Asia-Pacific Forum for Environment and Development (APFED) and the Asia-Pacific Environmental Innovation Strategy Project (APEIS), are now going out from our region to the world.

The Asia-Pacific Forum for Environment and Development (APFED) was launched at

the tenth ECO ASIA Congress, held in 2001, with the aim of presenting by 2004 a model for a more equitable type of sustainable development suitable for the Asia Pacific region.

The Asia-Pacific Environmental Innovation Strategy Project (APEIS) aims to utilize information obtained through state-of-the-art scientific technology to support developing countries in the formulation and implementation of environmental conservation policies by setting forth environmental policy options which will lead to sustainable development. This strategic project was endorsed at the tenth ECO ASIA, and its specific implementation plans were endorsed at the first meeting of the ECO ASIA Panel.

Reports on the progress of the project and on the follow-up to the Johannesburg Summit will be made by representatives of relevant organizations in the afternoon session, to be followed by a discussion of these reports by Congress participants.

The United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development held its follow-up session to the Johannesburg Summit last month. There was broad recognition at the meeting that effective regional input will play an important role in making progress with the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. There is no doubt that concrete initiatives at the regional level will become increasingly instrumental in the implementation of worldwide initiatives. ECO ASIA will, I hope, be recognized as the forum through which Ministers of this region express their views with regard to the CSD following frank and straightforward discussions.

I would like to close by expressing my hope for a lively and constructive exchange of views at this Congress. I look forward to ECO ASIA's contributions to the progress of sustainable development in the Asia-Pacific region.