

Thirteenth Environment Congress for Asia and the Pacific (ECO Asia 2005)

Chair's Summary

Gifu City, Gifu Prefecture, Japan

June 5, 2005

1. The Thirteenth Environment Congress for Asia and the Pacific, ECO Asia 2005, was held in the city of Gifu, Gifu Prefecture, Japan on June 4 and 5, 2005, hosted by the Ministry of the Environment of Japan and Gifu Prefecture with the cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Gifu City. The Congress was attended by national delegates from 19 countries, representatives from 12 international organizations, and a wide range of other participants.
2. With the Kyoto Protocol having entered into force in February this year, the Congress aimed at taking stock on the region's efforts toward sustainable development, particularly local initiatives to promote renewable energy. It also aimed at discussing broad directions for collaboration among different stakeholders within each country or local area and also among stakeholders from around the region, as ECO Asia is one of the opportunities for ministerial-level participants from the region to exchange views and opinions in a frank and informal manner. Participants attended in "COOL BIZ" attire.
3. The Congress was chaired by H.E. Ms. Koike Yuriko, Minister of the Environment of Japan. In her leadoff remarks and keynote address, Minister Koike overviewed important developments on the environmental front in recent years at the global and regional levels as well as encouraging developments in Japan. She specifically touched upon the entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol, the UN Decade for Education for Sustainable Development (DESD), the 3R (Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle) Initiative, the UNESCAP Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific (MCED5), and the Asia-Pacific Forum for Environment and Development (APFED). Minister Koike highlighted the importance of sharing the spirit of *mottainai* with people in this region in particular.
4. Mr. Furuta Hajime, Governor of Gifu Prefecture, then addressed the Congress, providing information on the prefecture's many proactive and dynamic environmentally-friendly policies and practices. Mr. Hosoe Shigemitsu, Mayor of Gifu City, then presented various local measures to build a human-centered city in harmony with the environment.
5. The Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Conference on Renewable Energies was held on June 4, 2005 in Gifu, in parallel to ECO Asia. Ms. Shimizu Kayoko, a member of the House of Councilors and

representative of the Organizing Committee of the Conference, addressed the Congress, noting the Conference's focus on climate change, energy security and promotion of sustainable development. She emphasized the role of renewable energies in improving quality of life and their potential for reducing the risk of conflict over energy resources. Mr. Kosugi Takashi, a member of the House of Representatives, and also a representative of the Organizing Committee of the Conference, reported to the Congress on June 5 a Political Declaration adopted at the Conference on the promotion of renewable energies in the Asia-Pacific region, which was well-received by the Congress.

6. Ms. Hironaka Wakako, a member of the House of Councilors and Vice-Chairperson of Global Environmental Action (GEA) reported the GEA International Eco Youth Conference in the Asia-Pacific Region, June 2-3, 2005 in Gifu, Japan. Approximately 20 participants, including 14 youth from 11 countries of the Asia-Pacific Region, participated in the conference. Representatives of UNESCO, UNU and the World Bank also attended. After the keynote speech and brief presentations by international organizations, youth participants made presentations on their activities, lessons learned and suggestions for further steps to promote the MDGs and the DESD. Based on active discussions, the conference developed recommendations for further steps to be taken by youth in the Asia-Pacific Region and actions to be taken to support their activities.
7. Dr. Barbara Hardy, APFED Member of Australia, then presented the outcome of the International Environmental Symposium 2005 in Tajimi, held on June 3, 2005 at the Ceramics Park "MINO" in the city of Tajimi, to promote local initiatives to tackle climate change. Presentations introduced initiatives being conducted both domestically and internationally. The discussions that followed also took up international cooperation to address climate change issues and means of encouraging proactive actions by individuals. She also emphasized that while training is important in the short run, education is important for long-term change.

Session 1: Local Initiatives to Address Global Environmental Issues

8. The first session began with three presentations by representatives of youth, NPOs and the private sector regarding local actions in Gifu Prefecture. These were followed by general discussion on actions and initiatives taken by countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Two students of Yamagata Municipal Miyama Junior High School of Yamagata, Gifu introduced their school-wide environmental education program which enabled hands-on interaction with the environment. Next, Mr. Matsumura Keigo of the NPO Nature & Science Club reported on initiatives including nature camps for city children and the Gifu Global Environment Cram School (intensive training courses), implemented with cooperation from the private sector.

Lastly, Mr. Asano Takushi of Nagoya Pulp Corporation reported on the use of biomass to boost energy efficiency and reduce CO₂ emissions from the company.

9. Congress participants reported major developments in their home countries and international organizations, which included (1) the mainstreaming of the environmental aspect into sectoral policies and programs, such as by strengthening environmental impact assessment, promoting environmentally sustainable transport, and integrating water resource management into land use management, (2) introduction of new and innovative policies such as the 3Rs and Extended Producer Responsibility, eco-labeling, economic instruments, and environmental rehabilitation such as reforestation, (3) promotion of synergies between the environment and poverty alleviation and other important social goals, such as those contained in the MDGs, (4) promotion of various community-based initiatives regarding water supply, sanitation, renewable energy, and environmental education, and (5) promotion of trans-country initiatives, such as measures to combat dust and sand storms in North East Asia, measures to address trans-boundary movements of wastes, and regional seas programs.

Session 2: Report on the Asia-Pacific Forum for Environment and Development (APFED) and its Future Activities

10. The session began with APFED members reporting on the outcome of the APFED process to the Congress. The APFED Final Report, adopted in December 2004 and formally presented at a side event to MCED5, is comprised of an Overview of the Region, a Future Vision of the Region, APFED Recommendations, and the APFED Action Platform. The recommendations, numbering over 100, are organized in the three groups of Integrated Approach to Sustainable Development, Multi-stakeholder Partnerships and Major Sectors. Congress participants noted strong support for the major recommendations contained in the Final Report and stressed the importance of follow-up actions to put the recommendations into practice.
11. Participants welcomed the APFED Action Platform as the follow-up to the APFED findings and emphasized the need to carry out the Platform's three major components, i.e., Multi-stakeholder Interactive Mechanisms, Sustainable Development Knowledge Initiative, and Innovation Showcases for Sustainable Development, in partnership with various stakeholders in the region. The participants noted that APFED holds a unique position in the Asia-Pacific region and expressed their strong hope that APFED would serve in its second phase as a "knowledge management" and "innovation facilitation" center of the region. Furthermore, participants highly evaluated APFED's strong record of success in bringing together diverse voices of various stakeholders in the APFED analyses and recommendations.

Session 3: Other Activities

12. With regard to APEIS, the meeting was informed of the progress over the last three years of the three sub-projects of APEIS, namely, Integrated Environmental Monitoring (IEM), Integrated Environmental Assessment (IEA), and Research on Innovative and Strategic Policy Options (RISPO). The meeting welcomed the encouraging achievements made by the three sub-projects and noted with appreciation extensive partnership that has developed among the many research institutes in the region, nurtured through the implementation of the APEIS sub-projects. In addition, participants noted the substantial contributions APEIS has made to international initiatives such as the Millennium Ecosystems Assessment.
13. The meeting welcomed a new development of APEIS (APEIS II), which has been prepared based upon the achievements made over the last three years. The Congress expressed its strong hope that APEIS continue to provide scientific tools and policy options for use in policy making for sustainable development in the region. The Congress recommended that the project maintain a close relationship with policy makers to ensure policy relevance and utilize research outcomes in capacity building. Congress participants pointed out the need to translate the findings of APEIS into practice, and with this in mind, the Congress supported the proposal to strengthen linkage between APEIS and other policy fora such as APFED in their second phase.
14. The Congress appreciated the leadership taken by the Japanese government to raise the 3R Initiative to the international level, noting extensive participation in the conference made by many developing countries in the region. Participants welcomed the suggestions made by the Government of Japan to develop a vision to bring about a sound material-cycle society in Asia and promote capacity development for the 3Rs in the region. The Congress also noted the importance of methodologies to evaluate the implementation of the 3Rs and of raising public awareness, as well as future actions for e-waste management.

KOIKE Yuriko
Chair, ECO Asia 2005