

FOREWORD

About 20 years ago, I was Parliamentary Vice-Minister of the Environment at the time of the Kyoto Conference (COP3) in 1997, engaged in the process of adoption of the Kyoto Protocol. That experience marked the start of my involvement in environmental policy, which has since become my life work. In those days, not everyone appreciated the importance of addressing environmental challenges. I am glad to say that circumstances have changed, and being environmentally-friendly is now discussed more or less as a matter of course.

Nevertheless, over those 20 years, the world's population has increased, and the global economy has continued to grow. The impact of human activities on the environment has increased to such an extent that an existential crisis now faces the global environment that provides the foundation for human survival. Climate change is a particularly urgent challenge. Its effects are already observable around the world, with rising air temperatures, melting snow and ice, and rising sea levels. Year-by-year, the damage caused by storms or typhoons, and the impact on crops and the ecology, are becoming increasingly evident in Japan.

Active cooperation by the international community to take action on such global issues led, in September 2015, to the United Nations General Assembly adopting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The SDGs show that it is important to find integrated solutions to environmental, economic, and social issues that are increasingly complex and increasingly serious. Japan has made that a basic principle of its environmental policy as it works towards achieving a sustainable society.

In November 2016, the Paris Agreement came into force as the first ever agreement to aim for effectively reducing greenhouse gas emissions to zero by the second half of this century. Under the Paris Agreement, the world has already set out on a path leading to a post-carbon society. When I

attended COP22 in Marrakech the same month to present Japan's commitments for transitioning to a post-carbon society, I sensed a powerful current of opinion in the international community. We now have to make further vigorous efforts to pursue domestic and international initiatives. The keys to a post-carbon society are rigorous energy saving and significant expansion of renewable energy. By enhancing carbon efficiency, raising the level of domestic investment, and expanding the scope of regional economic circulation, they become the motive force that drives new growth.

Based on these circumstances, the Annual Report on the Environment in Japan 2017 has taken "Socioeconomic Innovation through Environmental Measures" as its theme. It first provides an overview of developments in Japan based on the SDGs and the Paris Agreement. Then it examines the environmental, economic and social challenges that Japan faces, introducing the direction of efforts to create socioeconomic innovation and simultaneously solve economic and social issues, at the same time as resolving environmental issues through environmental policy

Each generation aims to pass on a slightly better world to future generations. It is my hope that this report will contribute to that process, with today's environment being slightly better than yesterday's, and the future environment being better still.



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