

Speeches by Hosts

YAMAGUCHI Shunichi

Chairman of Global Environmental Action (GEA)

Opening Ceremony, 23 October 2024

Good morning, I am Shunichi Yamaguchi, Chair of GEA, as introduced. This event was attended by Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress, as well as the Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, Environment Minister Keiichiro Asao, Parliamentary Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs Yasushi Hosaka, and representatives of the six co-hosting ministries. It is a tremendous honor to host the GEA International Conference, and on behalf of the hosts, I would like to once again express my sincere gratitude to all those, both in Japan and overseas, who have contributed to holding this international conference.

The year 2024 started with an unprecedentedly strong earthquake that struck the Noto Peninsula. The joyful scene of families gathering to celebrate the beginning of the new year was miserably destroyed in a heartbeat. To make matters worse, heavy rainfalls hit the affected areas to remind us again how powerless we are in the face of the natural dangers. I would like to express my deepest sympathies to the residents of the earthquake-damaged areas who are still struggling to recover.

It is our responsibility to pass on a bright future to our children, grandchildren, and future generations. The main theme of this international conference is “Promoting Measures to Simultaneously Decarbonize and Achieve the SDGs” to halt global warming which causes extreme weather events. Aiming to overcome the triple crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, the conference has brought together people from both Japan and overseas who are working on the front lines of solving global environmental issues and who are able to influence international public opinion.

I would like to once again express my sincere gratitude for your participation in this international conference, and I hope that, through the two-day discussion, you will propose measures that will stir up the international public. I would like to conclude my message on behalf of the hosts by asking for your cooperation to make this international conference a success. Thank you very much.

AOKI Kazuhiko

Director General of GEA/ Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary, Japan

Luncheon, 23 October 2024

As just kindly introduced, I am Kazuhiko Aoki, Director General of GEA. My father Mikio Aoki served as GEA Deputy Chair when Juro Saito, former President of the House of Councillors, was the fourth Chair. And now, upon the recommendation of the GEA Board, I was appointed as Director General with the consent of the GEA Organizing Committee.

My predecessor, Kayoko Shimizu, former Minister of State for the Environment Agency, is here with us today. I would like to express my sincere respect and gratitude for her years-long guidance of GEA in many ways. As far as I know, Ms. Shimizu retired on her own volition for reasons of age, but seeing her in good health here has fueled my determination to do my best as her successor. I would sincerely ask Ms. Shimizu for advice if I miss something. Now, with my respect to the great veteran being expressed, I can move forward with peace of mind.

Shortly after the New Year, a strong earthquake hit Ishikawa Prefecture, causing heavy damage. Though recovery is still underway, the area was hit again by a severe rainstorm to make the situation even direr, and I would like to express my deepest sympathy to all residents of the affected areas.

Abnormal weather has caused frequent natural disasters around the world, including torrential rains, floods, droughts, and extreme heat, on a scale never seen before. Unless we decarbonize our energy supplies, extreme weather events caused by global warming will not end.

At this GEA International Conference, we will hold discussions on how to promote measures to achieve simultaneously decarbonization and the SDGs. We have invited people from Japan and abroad who demonstrate leadership in various fields, including representatives of international bodies and authoritative research institutions that have a significant influence on international public opinion, as well as companies offering specific solutions. We expect that the results of fruitful discussions will definitely contribute to solving global environmental issues.

In closing, I would like to ask you all to attend and support this international conference during two days toward achieving good results. Thank you for your attention.

ASAO Keiichiro

Minister of the Environment, Japan

Luncheon, 23 October 2024

As introduced, I am Keiichiro Asao, Minister of the Environment. I would like to welcome Jim Skea, Chair of IPCC, as well as the other participants who have joined us today in the GEA International Conference. As Minister of the Environment, I heartily welcome all the participants. I would also like to express my deep respect to Chair Yamaguchi, Deputy Chair Obuchi, and the rest of GEA Organizing Committee for their efforts in preparing this conference.

Nowadays, we face a triple planetary crisis: climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. To solve these global environmental problems, we need the transformation to a sustainable economy and society. This transformation requires us to view overcoming the triple crisis and achieving the SDGs as one goal, as suggested by the theme of the conference, and to make an integrated effort to create synergy. In this context, the 6th Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly held on this March adopted a resolution on promoting synergetic approaches. As the country that initiated the resolution, Japan intends to lead efforts to strengthen synergy in cooperation with co-sponsoring countries and other partners.

From the next year onwards, we plan to work with international organizations, such as the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), toward compiling and publishing an “Asia-Pacific Synergy Report,” and to contribute to achieving the SDGs via dissemination of best regional practices and experience.

Meanwhile, the 16th Conference of the Parties (COP16) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is being held on the other side of the world in Colombia to discuss important issues regarding the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework adopted at the previous COP15. In addition, the 29th Conference of the Parties (COP29) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change will be held next month in Azerbaijan to discuss the next round of NDCs and other issues, based on the results of the first global stocktake in the previous year. Furthermore, the 5th session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution will be held in the Republic of Korea from late next month, and the negotiations will advance toward the formulation of an international treaty by the end of this year.

I believe, in these critical times, it is extremely meaningful that the best world’s experts have gathered here to discuss measures to address the triple planetary crisis and thus promote synergy. First of all, let us participants share our wisdom and outline a path toward a sustainable future.

In conclusion, I would like to express my sincere hope that this conference will be productive. Thank you very much.

HOSAKA Yasushi

Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Japan

Welcome Reception 23 October, 2024

Good evening, everyone. It is my great pleasure to welcome you all here to this Welcome Reception on the occasion of the GEA International Conference 2024.

The three planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution are interconnected and represent serious global challenges that must be urgently addressed.

In addressing these challenges, we must be aware of how to create synergies. For example, when developing products in a sustainable manner and distributing them in an environmentally friendly way, it is important to work on decarbonization, biodiversity conservation, and pollution reduction in a manner that creates synergies.

The key to resolving these interconnected environmental problems is international cooperation. Cross-disciplinary cooperation and creativity are required from public and private-sector stakeholders around the world.

For more than 30 years, the GEA International Conference has focused on global environmental issues, welcoming experts from Japan and overseas for earnest discussion on these issues. This year's conference is again being attended by prominent figures from a wide range of sectors, including the business community, international organizations, and academia.

I hope that discussions over the next two days will help to reinforce global action on this triple crisis and pave the way toward a sustainable society. Thank you for your attention.

HONDA Akiko

Parliamentary Vice-Minister of Education, Culture, Sports,
Science and Technology, Japan

Luncheon, 24 October 2024

Hello everyone. I am Akiko Honda, Parliamentary Vice-Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. I would like to offer a few words on behalf of the ministry.

First of all, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the participants, both from Japan and overseas, who are working on global environmental issues, as well as to Chair Shunichi Yamaguchi, the GEA Organizing Committee, and the secretariat for their efforts in organizing this conference.

Recently, extreme weather phenomena, such as heavy rains and heat waves, have been occurring around the world. In Japan, too, the average national temperature this summer was the highest on record, while heavy rainfalls caused damage all over the country. In this context, the Program for the Advanced Studies of Climate Change Projection by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology has revealed that the effects of global warming contributed a great deal to the record high temperatures and heavy rains in northern Japan and along the Sea of Japan in July this year.

Amidst the growing concern, both at home and abroad, over the impact of climate change, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) launched its Seventh Assessment Cycle in July of last year. IPCC Assessment Reports serve as the basis for climate change response measures taken by governments and other stakeholders. Aiming to contribute to global climate change countermeasures, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology is working to create and provide climate prediction data.

Against this backdrop, I believe that the GEA International Conference is very timely, including a keynote speech by IPCC Chair Jim Skea and discussion on the theme “Promoting Measures to Simultaneously Decarbonize and Achieve the SDGs: Overcoming the Triple Crisis of Climate Change, Biodiversity Loss, and Pollution.” The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology will continue to contribute to realizing a sustainable society by conducting climate change prediction research required for climate change adaptation and mitigation, promoting the utilization of global environment big data, and R&D of innovative GX technologies.

Let me conclude my remarks by expressing my hope that this conference will continue to grow toward achieving global environment conservation and sustainable development.

SHOJI Kenichi

Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Japan

Luncheon, 23 October 2024

As you have just heard, I am Kenichi Shoji, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. As a co-hosting ministry, we would like to welcome all in attendance and express our true respect for the efforts of Chair Yamaguchi and all those involved in organizing this event. This year's summer in Japan, along with the last year's, was the hottest since records began. In addition, the Noto region of Ishikawa Prefecture and other locations across the country were damaged by heavy rainfalls. Natural disasters have been more frequent and severe in recent years. Agriculture, forestry, and fisheries are vulnerable to the impact of climate change, such as a decline in rice quality and poor coloring of fruit. On the other hand, these industries are based on biodiversity and are therefore closely related to the theme of this international conference.

As more emphasis will be placed on the SDGs and environment both domestically and internationally, an appropriate response to these challenges and creation of sustainable food systems are becoming an urgent issue for Japan's food, agriculture, forestry and fisheries industries.

In this context, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries formulated the Strategy for Sustainable Food Systems, MIDORI in 2021 to set long-term goals, such as achieving zero CO₂ emissions and reducing the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and enacted the MIDORI Act in the following year (2022). In addition, we are cooperating with ASEAN countries, which have much in common with Japan in terms of agricultural production environment; based on the ASEAN-Japan MIDORI Cooperation Plan adopted last year, we are pursuing joint projects to utilize Japan's technology and experience cultivated through the Strategy for Sustainable Food Systems, MIDORI.

Moreover, the Basic Law on Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas, often called the "constitution of Japan's agricultural policy," was revised this year for the first time in a quarter century, and "establishing a food system in harmony with the environment" was defined as a new basic concept. We are willing to take this opportunity to further develop and disseminate technologies as well as behavior changes among stakeholders under the Strategy for Sustainable Food Systems, MIDORI toward improving both productivity and sustainability in the agriculture, forestry and fisheries industries.

Let me end by expressing my hope that this international conference will feature lively discussions and contribute to solving global issues through simultaneously achieving decarbonization and the SDGs. Thank you for your attention.

TAKEUCHI Shinji

Parliamentary Vice-Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry, Japan

Luncheon, 23 October 2024

Hello everybody, I am Shinji Takeuchi, Parliamentary Vice-Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry. I would like to say a few words on behalf of the Ministry.

First of all, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the participants from Japan and abroad who have taken time out of their busy schedules to attend this conference. I also would like to offer my deepest respect for GEA's years-long contribution to solving global environmental problems and establishing a sustainable society. International cooperation is indispensable for addressing global environmental issues, and I believe that the GEA International Conference, which brings together experts from all over the world, is an exceptionally valuable opportunity in this context.

Currently, global interest in climate change is growing; thus, countries accounting for approximately 90% of the world's GDP declare carbon neutrality. To achieve the goal of carbon neutrality worldwide, we need to transform our economy, society, and industry from the fossil fuel-dependent structure that remained unchanged since the Industrial Revolution into one based on clean energy, and combine emission reduction with economic growth and development. At the same time, the economic and geographical circumstances of each country are different, and the recent surge in geopolitical risks has caused significant changes in the global energy supply and demand structure. Utilizing a wide range of technologies and energy sources with due regard to stable energy supply is essential to efficiently reduce emissions.

As was also mentioned in the address by Prime Minister Ishiba, the Japanese government aims to simultaneously achieve decarbonization, economic growth, and energy security through Green Transformation (GX). In pursuit of GX, the Japanese government has carried out investment promotion measures worth 20 trillion yen using the GX Economy Transition Bonds to realize public-private GX investment of more than 150 trillion yen over the next ten years.

Actually, all industries cannot be decarbonized in a single step, and Japan has promoted "transition finance" to achieve steady decarbonization through energy conservation and transition. Fortunately, this political approach has been recognized as innovative by IEA, and we would like to further contribute to the establishment and expansion of the global transition finance market.

In addition, to increase predictability in the presence of uncertainties, such as an increase in electricity demand, and encourage domestic investment, we will hold comprehensive discussions covering the issues of energy, industrial structure and locations, and market development, as well as global situation and rulemaking, to draw up "GX2040 Vision" based on a longer-term perspective.

International cooperation is also essential to promote global emission reductions. Take Asia for example. Many countries here are facing common challenges for decarbonization, including heavy reliance on fossil fuels in power generation and a large share of manufacturing in the economy. Thus, we explore various paths to net zero emissions, with regard to the circumstances in Asia, through Asia Zero Emission Community (AZEC), a platform to promote decarbonization in the region. The second AZEC summit was held in Laos recently, where the leaders agreed on the “Action Plan for the Next Decade.” Particularly, the plan calls for establishing rules to visualize emissions throughout the supply chain and promote transition finance. This will encourage more projects across Asia towards a virtuous cycle of decarbonization.

The issues to be discussed at this year’s conference, including “climate change,” “biodiversity loss,” and “pollution,” are all urgent topics related to the global environment. I have high hopes that the conference will be an opportunity leading to future sustainable development throughout the world.

In closing, I would like to wish good health and continued success to all of you. Thank you for your attention.

KOYARI Takashi

Parliamentary Vice-Minister of Land, Infrastructure,
Transport and Tourism, Japan

Luncheon, 24 October 2024

My name is Takashi Koyari, and I am Parliamentary Vice-Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism. Let me say a few words on behalf of the co-hosting ministries.

First of all, I would like to sincerely welcome everyone who has come to this conference from Japan and overseas. I would also like to express my deep gratitude to Chair Shunichi Yamaguchi and all those involved in organizing this event.

As you all know, natural disasters have become more severe and frequent than ever before, as evidenced by the record-high precipitations observed throughout Japan. Now we cannot wait any longer to address decarbonization, coexistence with nature, and other issues of the global environment. In this context, I believe that this conference, themed “(Promoting Measures to) Simultaneously Decarbonize and Achieve and SDGs,” is held just in time.

Being responsible for transportation modes, such as automobiles, railroads, ships, and aircraft, as well as public infrastructure underlying all kinds of activities, and urban development, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism has diverse means for policy implementation. We, too, are determined to play our part in solving the global environmental issues of decarbonization, coexistence with nature, and pollution control, while leveraging our on-site strength and technological potential.

I hope that the GEA International Conference 2024 will contribute greatly to the realization of a sustainable future through active discussions among Japanese and foreign experts on global environmental issues. In closing, let me wish good health to all the participants. Thank you very much.