

Welcome Address



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Good morning. On behalf of the organizers, I would like to extend a cordial welcome and express my appreciation to all of you who have taken time out of your busy schedules to attend this symposium on the issues surrounding climate change.

The Japan-UK joint research project was initiated by the British and Japanese Ministers of the Environment two years ago this month. A later joint statement by the prime ministers of the two countries positioned the project as a bilateral joint research initiative. Since then, a meeting has been held in Tokyo (June 2006), another in London (June 2007), and this year marks the third such event of this kind.

Last year we made good progress toward the development of a low carbon society. The first step was marked by the publication of the Fourth Assessment Report of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC AR4). The report asserts that there is no doubt that climate change is occurring, and discusses the likelihood that it is caused by human activity. In addition, it states that the impact of climate change has been confirmed in almost all of the ecosystems currently under observation and that the situation is worsening. Furthermore, it maintains that if, in the next few decades, drastic measures are implemented that make use of currently available technologies and those that are to be commercialized in the future, it would be possible to limit the total emissions in 2030 to current levels. Therefore, the international community must heed the alarms being sounded by scientists around the world and implement policies and measures to stabilize climate change.

In December of last year, the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP13) was held in Bali, Indonesia. The focus of the Bali meeting was to initiate a new framework beyond 2013 with the participation of the major CO₂ emitting countries. In the past, developing countries have insisted that industrialized countries take responsibility for the climate change issue, but the IPCC, tackling the problem from the perspective of science, insists that the earth cannot be protected without the participation of the developing world. As a result, developing countries have also come to an agreement to reduce their emissions in the next generation of the framework. I was in attendance at this meeting and I can state from experience that the negotiation process was long and difficult. The meeting was extended for an extra day and in the last minutes of that day, an agreement was finally reached that by 2009 a new framework would be created with the participation of major emitting countries including the US, China, and India.

The international community has started building a “post-Kyoto” framework. In order for our

children and grandchildren to live safely on the earth for many years to come, we have to adopt a long term perspective for the reduction of GHGs. Last year, Japan proposed its “Cool Earth 50” initiative which calls for halving the world’s greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. At the World Economic Forum in Davos this year, Prime Minister Fukuda put forth the Cool Earth initiative and stated that as a part of Japan’s involvement in the new framework, it plans to set national targets for total emission reductions and strongly promote strategies to fight climate change. Climate change will be one of the biggest topics of discussion at the G8 Summit to be held at Lake Toya in July. As the host country, Japan is determined to lead discussions in the international community towards the realization of the Cool Earth 50 objectives.

In his policy statement speech, and during his speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Prime Minister Fukuda clearly stated that the low carbon society concept is to be the basic national policy for Japan. Halving greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 cannot be achieved by simply continuing on in the same manner as we are today. In addition to technological innovation, we must revise our production mechanisms, lifestyles, and transport and urban systems to achieve a fundamental shift in our social systems.

In the near future, Japan will become an aging society and the proportion of elderly people in the population will be much higher than it used to be. Elderly people will find driving difficult and will not be able to travel long distances to go shopping. They will have to be able to access medical services and buy food within walking distance of their houses. Compact and concise urban planning will be imperative to progress in this regard. The “community within walking distance” concept can be used as an example of one effort towards achieving a low carbon society. In this way, the joint Japan-UK project aims to show the international community what is meant by “low carbon society” and how such a society can be realized.

At today’s symposium, we will hear from developing countries, businesses, and the UK government, all of whom who are working towards the realization of a low carbon society. We will also hear a report from the expert meeting which was held over the past two days and which was attended by about eighty experts from 22 countries including developed, emerging, and developing countries such as China, India, and Thailand. Researchers and representatives from governmental and international organizations participated in this meeting to discuss sustainable development and investment barriers and opportunities related to climate change. They have come up with concrete measures to be implemented, and they will be presenting them to us this afternoon.

We have only just taken the first steps towards a low carbon society in the long journey towards 2050. I hope that this symposium will give us a roadmap to follow into the future. Thank you very much.