

Opening Address at the First Steering Committee Meeting of the
1st Asia-Pacific Water Summit
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At this, the opening of the first Steering Committee meeting of the 1st Asia-Pacific Water Summit, it is a great honour for me to deliver this speech as chairman. Firstly, I am profoundly grateful to all of you for taking time out of your busy schedules to participate in this meeting.

The Asia-Pacific region is currently facing serious water problems. It is a critical situation: in this region, one out of three people has no access to safe drinking water, and half of the population has no access to basic sanitation. Therefore, every nation in the region must commit itself to the resolution of these problems. If we are to accomplish further social and economic development in this region, we need to tackle these problems at all levels of each society. In addition, it is of overriding importance that national leaders stand in the forefront of the movement for the resolution of water problems.

Based on the resolution at the 4th World Water Forum, we are to hold the 1st Asia-Pacific Water Summit as part of our efforts to combat water problems. It will be held at Beppu, Oita Prefecture, in December 2007. This is a stage where national and social leaders from various fields will assemble in order to deepen their common understanding of regional water problems, to share their resolve, and to search for concrete actions towards the resolution of these problems.

At present, the secretariat of the Asia-Pacific Water Forum, under the leadership of the APWF governing council, is classifying regional water problems into three priority themes: water financing, water-related disaster management, and water for development and eco-systems, and is intensively studying the issues. I hope that the first outcomes will be presented at the 1st Summit.

With regard to priority themes, it is needless to say that national leaders should promote

effective and appropriate financing for water-related infrastructure. At the same time, we must not forget to invest in capacity building for the maintenance and sustainable use of the infrastructure. Particularly in this region, where people have created unique civilizations based on a harmonious relationship between man and nature, the importance of the coexistence of man with nature cannot be overemphasized.

It is urgent to take specific measures such as early-warning systems to reduce casualties caused by water-related disasters, since the Asia-Pacific region, where there are many densely inhabited areas along the coastlines, accounts for 80% of the world's fatalities resulting from water-related disasters.

Asian countries, especially India and China, are showing spectacular economic development these days. However, unfortunately this is threatening eco-systems in the region, with the decrease of mangrove and other forests. In order to maintain sustainable development and secure diverse eco-systems, the maintenance and conservation of a rich water environment is of the utmost importance.

When it comes to the controversial issue of climate change, its deepest impact on us will be felt through water. In Tuvalu, an island country in the South Pacific, people are concerned about their future, as flood damage caused by rising sea levels and saline intrusion into drinking water are wide-spread.

In Australia, a prolonged drought has been worsening markedly since last year, as there has been only a little rain since 2001. When I hear the news that the water shortage is too severe to sustain farming because water intake for agricultural use is being restricted, I am deeply concerned about the plight people are facing there.

Recently, I had a talk with the Prince of Orange, of The Netherlands, who is chair of the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation, when he visited Japan. He was worried about negative impacts of climate change on water issues in some African countries, as he had seen no snow on the top of Mt. Kilimanjaro during a recent trip to Africa.

The 4th report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change issued in February 2007 pointed to a tendency towards heavier and more frequent rainfalls. It also warned that we would face more serious water problems, as, on the one hand, desertification and water shortages spread and, on the other hand, water-related disasters such as flooding become

more acute.

The Asia-Pacific region is vulnerable to climate change. In fact, it may be considered extremely vulnerable. In order to protect precious lives as well as the cultures and histories that the people of this region have assiduously created, we must tackle global warming and take preventive measures to reduce the negative impact of global warming on already worsening water problems.

As for another problem in this region, infectious diseases are widespread. Therefore, the fight against infectious diseases is also one of our most important challenges. I have dedicated myself to working for the elimination of infectious diseases such as AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis from the world. At the Okinawa G8 Summit in 2000, we discussed for the first time, as a major agenda item, how to fight infectious diseases, and produced the Okinawa Infectious Diseases Initiative. In 2002, I endeavored to launch the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria, and I am now serving as president of Friends of the Global Fund, Japan. I believe that the solution of water problems will lead to victory in the war on infectious diseases, as these are closely linked to water.

I renew my pledge to collect all wisdom accumulated in the past and find concrete solutions for current and future water problems at the 1st Asia-Pacific Water Summit. I understand they are planning a water summit in Africa, which is suffering from most serious water problems. If leaders in the Asia-Pacific region demonstrate strong leadership in the fight against water problems, they will provide a good model for leaders in Africa and other regions across the world.

I eagerly anticipate a large attendance of heads of governments and leaders from various fields for the success of this summit. I would like to call on all the participants, especially members of the steering committee, for further support and cooperation. I am looking forward to your lively discussions.

Thank you for your kind attention.