

AN APPEAL FROM ASIA TO ADDRESS DESERTIFICATION

By Mr. Ryutaro Hashimoto*

It is a great honour for me to be designated as an Honorary Spokesperson for the International Year of Deserts and Desertification and I am firmly committed to performing the important tasks entrusted upon me.

Desertification is a major challenge facing the world, also in the Asia region. More than one third of degraded arable drylands is in Asia. Yet how many Asian people are actually aware of the seriousness of the situation and are responding to it in an appropriately urgent manner? The reality is that this crisis cannot be tackled unless those who don't actually live in affected areas, and are therefore not directly involved with the problem, also come to recognize the true impact of desertification and its consequences.

Every year in early spring, yellow dust and sandstorms blow particles over 4000 km from mainland China to Japan. Yet how many Japanese understand the real story behind this yellow sand or dust? In order to raise awareness of its implications among the Japanese people, I would like to make an appeal "from Asia to the world" on various challenges posed by desertification. I will undertake such a campaign in collaboration with various other partners, including the Japanese Ministry of Environment and the United Nations University.

This is a complex problem and there is no magic wand which can be waved in order to solve it. It takes a collective effort, from each and every one of us, to do whatever lies in our power to stop further desertification on this planet. I sincerely hope that people will resolve to take action on this serious issue so that we can leave the legacy of a healthy global environment to future generations.

** Mr. Ryutaro Hashimoto, former Japanese Prime Minister, is Honorary Spokesperson for the International Year of Deserts and Desertification.*