

Public Forum “Combating Desertification and Agricultural Development”
Keynote Address¹ **Please see footnote**

Mr. Ryutaro Hashimoto
Honorary Spokesperson for the International Year of Desert and Desertification

Yayoi Hall, University of Tokyo
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(Introduction)

Thank you for your kind introduction. I am Hashimoto. I first thank Mr. Yatsu, Chairman of the BLOBE Japan, Ms. Farhana Haque Rahman, Chief of the Public Information of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and others who have given me a chance to address to you today. As an Honorary Spokesperson for the International Year of Deserts and Desertification (IYDD), I am very pleased that this event has taken place like this.

(Recent development)

As Chairman Yatsu mentioned in his opening speech earlier, I was the Chairman of the Global Legislators’ Organization for a Balanced Environment (GLOBE Japan) up until last year and worked with Mr. Yatsu and other parliamentarians for many years. During my chairmanship, I strived toward tackling global environmental issues and solving various problems in partnership with the parliamentarians of other countries and international organizations through various initiatives such as supporting the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol and the submission of recommendations to the G8 Environmental Ministerial Meetings. With the University of Tokyo and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), we organized a dialogue session entitled “Indigenous People and Natural Resource Management for Pursuing Agricultural Development and the Better Environment” at the UN Pavilion during the Aichi Expo 2005 last summer. Mr. Renert Böge, the President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and Mr Hama Arba Diallo, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification are my good and old friends. I am currently devoting myself to solving various water issues as Chairman of the United Nations Advisory Committee on Water and Sanitation, and Chairman of the non-profit organization called Japan Water Forum. Water issues and desertification are two sides of the same coin, and I was designated as the Spokesperson for the IYDD for these reasons.

(Role of the Honorary Spokesperson and future programmes)

First of all, for those who are not familiar with this, I would like to briefly explain the background of the IYDD, the role of the Honorary Spokesperson, and future programmes. At the 58th session of the United Nations General Assembly held in 2003, it was decided to designate the year of 2006 as the International Year of Deserts and Desertification in the light to commemorate its 10th anniversary of its entry into force. The IYDD was intended to raise awareness of the international community on the need for combating desertification, achieving “Millennium Development Goals” on poverty reduction, and conserving biodiversity/knowledge and tradition in the areas affected by desertification. At present, there are four Honorary Spokespersons including myself. They are Ms. Wangari Maathai, 2004 Nobel Peace Award laureate and Deputy Minister of Environment of Kenya, Mr. Cherif Rahmani, Environment Minister of Algeria, Mr. Hristo Stoichkov, a famous soccer player and current coach of the Bulgarian national team, and myself. In the coming months, I will make efforts to further pave ways for combating desertification in the world in collaboration with other Honorary Spokespersons. As to the future programmes, it is planned to convene international conferences entitled “Living with deserts: Dryland science and governance in combating desertification” at the United Nations University on 25 August and “International Symposium on dryland science and combating desertification: what each individual can do now” in Tottori Prefecture on 27 August in collaboration with the University of Tokyo, Tottori University, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of the Environment and others. In September, there is a

1 *This statement was to be delivered by Mr. Hashimoto on 5 June 2006 at the University of Tokyo. Due to failing health, however, he was unable to do so. He passed away on 1 July 2006.

plan to take actions at the 61st session of the United Nations General Assembly. Please check my website if you have any further interest.

(Addressing desertification issues)

Drought and desertification are serious challenges even in the Asia region. More than one-thirds of deserted areas in arable drylands are in Asia. However, how many Asian people know by all means this reality and tackle this issue with sense of urgency? We cannot change these threatening situations unless people other than those who live and face the reality of serious drought and desertification learn their seriousness. It is estimated that 250 million people are directly affected by desertification in the world. And the majority of these people are poor. In order to achieve the “Millennium Development Goals” for halving the poor with the daily income of less than 1 dollar by 2015, it is one of the very important policies to undertake effective measures for desertification issues.

(Causes of desertification)

It is said that the causes of desertification are affected by various factors such as climate change. However, the factors such as deforestation, over-grazing, over-cultivation, excessive irrigation and excessive agrochemical use also cause large impacts. It is important to establish a strategy and set a priority for combating desertification and mitigating drought impacts. For this purpose, it is essential to take actions aimed at long-term goals rather than myopic interests through forging consensus among the governments, experts and affected people, and conducting thorough research. I am not an expert on this issue and not able to tell you in details, but it takes multiple folds of efforts and cost to restore degraded land than what took for degradation processes.

(Situation in Japan)

Yellow sand or sand particles fall in Japan that comes over about 4 thousand kilometers away from mainland China every spring. It is reported that the area equivalent to a half of Metropolitan Tokyo was deserted in China last year. On 17 April this year, I visited China as Chairman of the Japan International Trade Facilitation Association. On that day, I was informed that about 300,000 tons of yellow sand/sand particles fell on in Beijing just for a day. On the following day, Japanese Meteorology Agency announced that the falling of yellow sand/sand particle was observed at more than 55 monitoring stations within Japan, and it was the first time in Chiba for the last 18 years, and the first time in Tokyo for the last 6 years. In China and South Korea, the numbers of patients claiming ophthalmologic and respiratory disorder and the frequency of transportation hindrances have been increasing while it is concerned on the effects on the precision instrument industry.

(Situation in Japan Part 2)

I visited Kumamoto for some engagements the other day and returned to Tokyo without seeing the well-known beautiful Aso mountain range due to the effects of yellow sand/sand particles. I am a fervent photographer and it was a great pity that I could not take even a shot of the Aso Mountain with grown green grass in early spring. It was reported that sand particles were stuck on the airplane at Fukuoka Airport. In such circumstances, do Japanese people really understand what this yellow sand/sand particle means? Not so many people think that poverty issues caused by desertification are related to the underlying causes of conflicts and terrorism in the world.

(Situation in Japan: Part 3)

On the other hand, you know that the food self-sufficiency on the calorie basis is around 40%. It means that you depend on food from overseas for 60%. At the same time, did you know that we have a food waste that amount 20 million tons per year? The Japan's rice production is about 9 million tons per year and it means that the food in the quantity that is more than double of the Japan's yearly rice production is discarded. At the “Third World Water Forum” of which I served as the Steering Committee chairman provided figures on the so called “virtual water” that is the estimated water quantity to be used to produce agricultural or industrial products. The result showed that the Japan is the world largest virtual water importing countries, and the amount of the virtual water accounts for about 4 times of the water quantity in Lake Biwa, Japan. Not all of these foods and virtual water are imported from dryland countries, but it is evident that we,

people in Japan live with the benefits of limited water resources on this planet, and shouldn't it be our task to achieve as a member of the international community to support those countries that do not benefit from such planetary resources.

(Importance of agriculture)

In March this year, I attended the Forth World Water Forum in Mexico City and at that time, I had a chance to visit the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center called "CIMMYT." This is an institute where Dr. Norman Borlaug, a Nobel Peace Award laureate was working relentlessly to improve species of wheat and maize for long time even before receiving the Award, and it later on became an originating place of "Green Revolution." It is said that the gene of wheat saved 100 million people's lives. Agriculture is a basis for social stability and peace, and it is the largest principal industry in developing countries and plays an important role in promoting social development. Therefore, misled development aggravates land, ruins rural villages and prompts desertification. The exacerbated living conditions further incur social instability and may even bring upon possibilities of creating a breeding ground for terrorism. We must make the best use of our human wisdom and promote agricultural development and environmental rehabilitation thereby facilitating poverty reduction. The world is connected through foods. Therefore, whenever any abnormality occurs in the world, it affects other regions indirectly or directly. At present, Japan and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has been playing an important role in supporting the international community in collaboration with the CIMMYT. With respect to the today's topic of combating desertification, I believe that it is highly possible to effectively advance agricultural development and desertification control by consolidating our human wisdom.

(Appealing on the importance of combating desertification)

It is indeed vital that we protect forests and woodlands, conserve water resources, care farms and paddy land and produce foods in order for us to co-exist in the global environment. In 2002, I participated in tree plantation with 100,000 Japanese delegation members to China to commemorate the 30th anniversary of Japan-China diplomatic normalization. Local people currently look after planted trees and expand the forested areas by themselves. My action may be just a drop of water in the desert. However, it would be very grateful if it has given a chance for the local people to think of its meaning, its importance and learn the significance of protecting forests. I supported that activity with such sentiment. At the today's meeting, I understand that many people involved in revegetation in dryland or deserted land will give very interesting talks. While listening to them, I hope that you will have a chance to think of why it is important to mitigate drought and combat desertification, what is the significance of supporting agricultural development as measures for combating desertification, and what each of us can actually do, and that you will support such undertakings.

(Concluding remarks)

As one of the Honorable Spokespersons, I would like to widely appeal from Asia to the world toward solving various problems caused by drought and desertification. We don't have a magic stick. The effort to be made by each one of us on in this world is the only way to combat desertification on this planet. I would like to conclude my remarks by wishing that we will leave behind the better global environment for our children and grandchildren.

I thank you for your kind attention.