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In representing and facilitating science in Japan—encompassing a diverse community of scholars from the humanities and social and natural sciences—the Science Council of Japan actively promotes the learning systems, institutions, and policy-processes that can enable sustainable development.

This annual International Conference on Science and Technology for Sustainability has been a crucial part of the Council's efforts since 2003.

In the past eight years, this public symposium has allowed a wide range of scholars from Japan and abroad to both extend their fields of expertise and to deepen the public dialogue on such key themes as Energy, Asian Megacities, Dynamism in Asia, Global Innovation Ecosystems, International Cooperation for Development, Sustainable Well-Being, Global Food Security and Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity. Each of these symposia entailed dynamic discussions, and the ideas and viewpoints exchanged in them have become valuable intellectual assets of the Science Council of Japan, with continuing impact on its operations.

It is therefore my pleasure to welcome you all to this 2011 symposium on sustainability in Asia. More than 60% of the global population is concentrated in Asia, and the total GDP of Asian countries is equal to about one-third of the global GDP. The region as a whole is characterized by rapid population and economic growth and urbanization, great disparities of wealth both within and between countries, and social and ecological vulnerability to the potential impacts of climate change. At the same time, however, the region offers many examples of long-term social and ecological sustainability in the midst of great ecological diversity, including many traditional systems of agriculture and livelihood that have supported large numbers of people through time. Some contemporary sustainability challenges in Asia will require wholly new approaches in science, technology and governance; “innovation” will also entail more active recognition of the wisdom already embedded in traditional thought and patterns of livelihood. In either case, designing sustainable interactions between humanity and nature in Asia is a global challenge, for there can be no global sustainability without it.

In 2010, the International Council for Science (ICSU) issued a report on “Earth System Science for Global Sustainability: The Grand Challenges”, which emphasized

five areas: forecasting, observing, confining, responding and innovating for development. Responding to ICSU's important and timely recommendation, this conference provides an opportunity to identify and discuss adoption of these action items in the Asian context, and to describe their potential contribution to solution of the key sustainability challenges in Asia.

As you are well aware, in March of this year eastern Japan suffered an unprecedented sequence of major disasters. We should acknowledge the terrible human tragedy and continuing hardship of recovery in the Tohoku region, and yet, as scientists and societies, we must learn from such situations, for they can offer important lessons to people both near and far. With several major tsunami and earthquakes in recent memory, our discussions of sustainability in Asia certainly should include adequate planning for and management of the risks posed by abrupt natural and human disasters.

With these facts in mind, we extend our sincere appreciation to you, distinguished international and Japanese scientists of the global environment, disaster risk and sustainability studies. I hope that the conference will be a stimulating and beneficial place of interdisciplinary knowledge creation and networking, and that it will substantially contribute to our ability to define sustainability science for Asia and for the world.

With these few words, I conclude my message as the representative of Science Council of Japan, and express my gratitude to the International Council for Science (ICSU), Research Institute for Humanity and Nature (RIHN), Global COE Programs of Nagoya University, Hokkaido University and Tohoku University, United Nations University (UNU), NIKKEI Inc., and of course to everyone participating in the conference.