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UNU-IAS GEOC

United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability GEOC Programme

Greetings from GEOC

On celebrating the 20th anniversary
of its establishment

Tsunao Watanabe
GEOC Programme Coordinator

I would like to convey my warm greetings on behalf of the Global Environment Outreach Centre (GEOC). GEOC was established in 1996 as a joint initiative of the Ministry of the Environment of Japan and the United Nations University (UNU) to encourage a wide range of stakeholders to participate in efforts to promote partnerships to realize a sustainable society as outlined in the Agenda 21. Next year, GEOC will celebrate the 20th anniversary of its establishment. The year 2015, the year before the anniversary, marks the 40th anniversary of the foundation of UNU, and GEOC is actively cooperating in UNU's celebration of the 40th anniversary.

Up to now, based on close partnership with the United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability (UNU-IAS) and its predecessor, the United Nations University Institute for Sustainability and Peace, GEOC has cooperated in hosting various international

conferences and workshops and has disseminated information on international discussions about global challenges in Japan and abroad, thus playing a vital role in UNU's outreach programs.

In recent years, GEOC has made ample use of major international events, such as the Tenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (Nagoya, 2010), the UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development (Nagoya, 2014), and the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (Sendai, 2015), to collect and disseminate relevant information in Japan and abroad, provide exchange opportunities among parties concerned, and host symposiums and exhibitions for the general public, thereby contributing to encouraging various stakeholders to participate in discussions in the international community.

In September of this year, UN member countries adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as the successor to the Millennium Development Goals, whose target year is 2015, and achieving these agenda has become its new international goal for the period from 2016 to 2030. It is emphasized that in order

to implement these ambitious agenda, it is indispensable to ensure participation by a wide range of stakeholders, including international agencies and national governments as well as local governments, educational and research institutions, private businesses, and NGOs, and to establish global partnerships among them. GEOC will work to spread SDGs in Japan and promote multi-stakeholder partnerships to achieve these goals.

In the future, GEOC will continue cooperating with those working to create a sustainable society and strive for further development as its 20th anniversary approaches. Your support would be very much appreciated.



Tsunao Watanabe
UNU-IAS
GEOC Programme Coordinator

Tsunao Watanabe joined the Ministry of the Environment in 1978. In January 2011, after serving as councilor in charge of the natural environment, he became director-general of the Nature Conservation Bureau. He served as secretary-general of the preparatory office for the Tenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP10). He has been holding the current post since November 2012.

UNU Special Symposium

Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

On 6 November 2015, UNU will host a symposium at its headquarters in commemoration of the 40th anniversary of its foundation. In order to promote the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was adopted by members of the United Nations at the end of September, this symposium will focus on such subjects as the roles of scientific knowledge and education and ideal public-private partnerships to discuss how a wide range of stakeholders can work together for the success of this global initiative. In addition to supporting the event, GEOC will hold an exhibit of SDGs at the Multi-purpose Space (2F) for the purpose of spreading SDGs throughout the country.

GEOC

Global Environment Outreach Centre

Global Environment Outreach Centre (GEOC), a joint programme between the Ministry of the Environment of Japan and UNU, contributes to improving communications and outreach between stakeholders through establishing partnership in order to realize a sustainable society.

International Day for Biological Diversity: Connecting and Supporting Forests, the Countryside, Rivers and the Sea

On 30 May, 2015, in commemoration of the UN International Day for Biological Diversity (22 May), the UNU-IAS co-hosted a public symposium entitled “Connecting and Supporting Forests, the Countryside, Rivers, and the Sea” jointly with the Ministry of the Environment and GEOC, and some 270 participants graced the event.

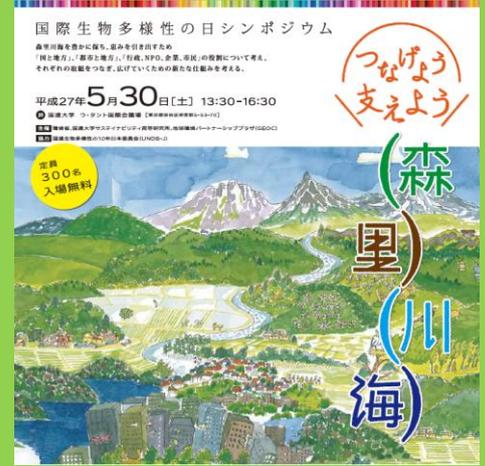
Our lives are supported by the bounties of nature, including abundant supply of water, clean air, food, and other resources, as well as nature-based distinctive cultures and leisure activities, and such fertile, natural bounties are made available by interconnected forests, countrysides, rivers, and seas. However, excessive development, overuse, and poor management of the environment have disrupted the linkage among these ecosystems and degraded their quality. Furthermore, the ongoing climate change has accelerated the disruption and degradation. In this symposium, through a keynote lecture by an expert, presentations of examples of regional initiatives, and panel discussions, participants were called on to contemplate what systems are needed to maintain natural bounties and derive blessings from them.

The symposium was highlighted by the opening remarks by Ms. Hinako Takahashi, Parliamentary Secretary for the Environment, and Dr. Kazuhiko Takemoto, Director of UNU-IAS. These were followed by a video message from Mr. Braulio F. de Souza Dias, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, in which he praised the initiative to link forests, countryside, rivers, and seas as an important step to proclaim the idea of “Biodiversity for Sustainable Development,” the international theme for this year’s International Day for Biological Diversity.

In his keynote lecture, Prof. Kazuhiko Takeuchi, Senior Vice-Rector of UNU and Director and Professor at the University of Tokyo’s Integrated Research System for Sustainability Science, emphasized the importance of creating a sustainable society by integrating a low-carbon society, a recycling society, and a symbiotic society. He also indicated that since the Great East Japan Earthquake, he had felt the urgency to consider how to build a safe and secure society as the basis for a sustainable society. As part of the strategy to build such a society, he made the following proposals: (1) design a favorable cycle between the environment and economy, (2) revitalize local communities environmentally, (3) make the most of the blessings of nature for a healthy and comfortable life, (4) develop environmental infrastructure, (5) apply environmental technology in Japan and abroad, and (6) lead the world through environmental diplomacy. In addition, he pointed out that cities and agricultural villages should work together to form a sphere of life while ensuring recycling and coexistence in local communities. He added that community development that gives importance to interconnected forests, countrysides, rivers, and seas will lead to the creation of such a civilized society.

Following the keynote lecture, Professor Shiro Wakui of Tokyo City University, who is acting chair of the UNDB-J Committee, presented a draft interim report on the “Connecting and Supporting Forests, the Countryside, Rivers and the Sea” project. He explained that the project, which aims to create a society in which each and every one of its members supports the bounties of nature while maintaining the diversity of the natural environment, would work on such initiatives as responding to population decrease and aging, contributing to regional revitalization, and establishing closer cooperation among stakeholders and local communities. In addition, he emphasized that there is no other way but to entrust our future to ecosystem services, and that it is necessary to secure a sustainable future in which ecosystem services are not lost.

Then, examples of regional initiatives were presented. Mr. Yasuyuki Yoshizawa, Representative Director of the Bashobunka Forum, expressed hope that regional revitalization would be driven by a new style of the society that spreads the circle of interconnected people and people connected with nature, and takes the needs of people into consideration. Mr. Hideo Awai, Representative Director of Mt. Fuji Springs Inc., reported that in return for



being able to utilize abundant, clean groundwater of Mt. Fuji in its business, he has taken the initiative in contributing to the community where the company operates. As examples of such contribution, he cited forest conservation to nurture water sources, employment of local people, and relocation of the company’s head office to Fujiyoshida City. Ms. Hiroko Endo, Manager in Charge of Environmental Promotion, Policy Division, Environmental Creation Bureau, City of Yokohama, presented the city government’s initiatives, such as the conservation of lignosa and agricultural land by making the best use of green tax, the afforestation of urban districts, and the preservation of forests in Yamanashi Prefecture’s Doshi Village, the source of water supply in the city. She also expressed her wish that Yokohama City covered with verdure be handed down to the next generation.



Presided over by its coordinator, Professor Wakui, the panel discussion featured five panelists who discussed the theme “Transforming society into one that preserves rich nature of forests, countryside, rivers, and seas and draws blessings from them: Restoring Japanese views of nature” from their respective standpoints. Ms. Miho Takagi, a TV personality who works the land, pointed out the negativity of the mass media toward taking up the environment as a subject and stressed the necessity of rediscovering the value of nature and creating a society in which economy and nature coexist and co-prosper with each other. Mr. Bunmei Nakamura, Director of the Tama River Headwaters Institute, indicated the importance of having more people learn about the attraction of river sources, the source of water that supports all forms of life. Mr. Kyosuke Inoue, NHK Chief Producer in Media Reporting and Author of *Satoyama Shihonshugi* (*Satoyama Capitalism*), disclosed the importance of communicating information on *satoyama* and *satoumi* from Japan. Mr. Satoru Yahata, a marine adventurer and deputy director of Umihenro, an NPO, commented that in a future society, it would be important to experience spending happy times with nature. Mr. Tokutaro Nakai, Councillor, Minister’s Secretariat, Ministry of the Environment, said that through the “Connecting and Supporting Forests, the Countryside, Rivers, and the Sea” project, the Ministry would push bottom-up initiatives while listening to people’s opinions and the voice of nature. Professor Wakui concluded the panel discussion by stressing that humans should recognize anew that they are part of the natural cycle of life, and expressing hope that regaining the interconnected forests, countrysides, rivers, and seas would become a nationwide movement.