

International GEA (Global Environmental Action) Conference

A Greeting from the Prime Minister

His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince Naruhito, Her Imperial Highness the Crown Princess Masako, and assembled guests, allow me to greet you on the occasion of the International GEA (Global Environmental Action) Conference.

I warmly welcome each person who has traveled to Japan to attend this event, which has come about due to the untiring efforts of many people.

At the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg last year, participants discussed the grave state of the environment: global warming, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, and other problems. The ultimate cause of these environmental problems—which now threaten the very survival of humanity—lies in the tremendous environmental load imposed by our daily lives and business activities.

We are responsible for leaving to our descendants in the 21st century clean air and water, abundant natural surroundings, and a life-nourishing environment. We must leave them a society that has learned how to coexist harmoniously with the environment. This will require us to reexamine at the deepest level the way we live and to transform our economic activities into a more sustainable form.

Because we understand this imperative, the Koizumi Cabinet has made environmental preservation and coexistence with nature a centerpiece of our administration's policies.

Starting with an issue close at hand, as soon as I became prime minister, I had all 7,000 government-owned vehicles converted into low-emission vehicles in three years. Last year, I introduced the first commercially available fuel-cell vehicles in the world for government use. This led to broad dissemination of these vehicles in Japan. This is a good example of a concrete step by my cabinet to further our basic policy of using scientific technology to strike a balance between environmental preservation and economic development. We will continue to vigorously pursue countermeasures to global warming, step up recycling systems, and reinforce other environmental measures.

In my speech at the Johannesburg summit, I said that the key to furthering sustainable development is people. Explaining that Japan has emphasized education above all else in its development, I proposed the “Decade for Education on Sustainable Development.” The U.N. General Assembly adopted a resolution supporting the

proposal and calling for the start of implementation in 2005.

For various countries to gather at the GEA Conference to discuss how to better protect the Earth's environment through education, IT, and the use of natural materials is indeed significant. I close with hopes that this conference will contribute to a truly sustainable future for our planet.