

Juro Saito, Chairman of GEA

Opening ceremony
Friday October 24, 2003

His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince, Her Imperial Highness the Crown Princess, Prime Minister Mr. Junichiro Koizumi and other guests from Japan and abroad, thank you for attending the opening ceremony of GEA Conference for Sustainable Future. It is a true honor and utmost pleasure to open the conference in the attendance of such distinguished guests. I wish to offer my sincere gratitude on behalf of the organizer.

The conference has attracted the participation of people from various parts of the world and various fields sharing sincere commitment to resolving issues of the global environment, a common challenge for the human race. Let me express my deepest respect to your activities, as I welcome you all to the conference.

The 20th century was a century of conflicts, experiencing two world wars. It was also the century when astonishing developments of science and technology brought healthy and affluent life to many people around the world. Yet, the development has caused an ever-widening gap between the have's and the have-nots on a global scale, and cast a big question on whether our limited natural resources can continue to provide for the mushrooming world population.

The basis for resolving this challenge lies in the "minds of us humans". Just as we respect diverse values, diverse cultures, diverse lifestyles and biodiversity, the human society must take on its common challenges while respecting social and cultural diversity.

Global Environmental Action or GEA has its roots in the "International Eminent Persons' Meeting on Financing Global Environment", which the late former Prime Minister Noboru Takeshita organized in 1992 together with the secretariat of the Earth Summit in preparation for the U.N. Conference on Environment and Development. Since establishment, GEA has organized international conferences in conjunction with the U.N. Commission on Sustainable Development, and issued various proposals concerning the future of the human race.

The World Summit on Sustainable Development, held last September in Johannesburg, South Africa, made numerous achievements, including the resolution to define the 10 year period starting 2005 as the "Decade of Education for Sustainable Development". In response to the achievements of the World Summit, this conference seeks to define specific guidelines in achieving "sustainable future" under the key phrases of "education", "IT" and "natural resources".

I strongly hope that the outcome of your debate at the conference will help shape the guidelines for a sustainable future. As I conclude my speech, let me also express my hope that the three-day conference will establish new partnerships among participants.

Thank you very much.