

**First RCE Thematic Conference: Towards Achieving the SDGs
5-7 December, 2017, Okayama, Japan**



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UNU-IAS

Institute for the Advanced Study
of Sustainability

Opening Remarks

5 December, 2017, Okayama, Japan

Presenters:

- **Prof. Hirofumi Abe (Chairperson, Okayama ESD Promotion Commission)**
- **Prof. Hirofumi Makino (President, Okayama University)**
- **Prof. Kazuhiko Takemoto (Director, UNU-IAS)**
- **Mr. Masao Omori (Mayor of Okayama city)**
- **Mr. Masaaki Kobayashi (Senior Adviser, Ministry of the Environment, Japan)**

Prof. Hirofumi Abe (Chairperson, Okayama ESD Promotion Commission)

On behalf of RCE Okayama, Prof. Hirofumi Abe extended a warm welcome to all of those in attendance and expressed his gratitude for the support of those involved in organising the meeting. He explained that Okayama city was certified as one of the first seven acknowledged Regional Centres of Expertise on ESD (RCE) in the world in 2005 (along with the commencement of the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD)), and that they had the privilege of hosting the 9th Global RCE Conference in 2014. He welcomed returning visitors to the city, and stated that under the current Mayor's leadership, Okayama has seen more tourists than before, with tourism being heavily promoted. He then mentioned that Okayama has been certified as a key partner for UNESCO, and continues to be engaged in UNESCO activities. He expressed his hope that the outcomes of the conference would provide new outlooks for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in terms of the three themes; Biodiversity, Sustainable Consumption and Production and Climate Change. Prof. Hirofumi Abe concluded his address by wishing everyone an enjoyable stay in Japan.

Prof. Hirofumi Makino (President, Okayama University)

Prof. Hirofumi Makino welcomed everyone to the First RCE Thematic Conference and expressed his sincere appreciation for the honour of hosting the conference, which brought together over 100 RCE members together from all regions of the world. He explained that leadership decisions are informed by Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and that at Okayama University they seek to establish, encourage and spread a policy to students that outcomes should be measurable and contribute to the improvement of society. Added to this is the necessity of strengthening the SDGs in industry, academia, government and activities with the viewpoint of solving social problems when interacting with the community. He acknowledged that stakeholder collaboration is key towards fostering a better future at Okayama University. Mr. Makino then stated that after becoming president, he met Takemoto-san, Director, UNU-IAS, to discuss Okayama University's long history of involvement with the SDGs, notably that in 2007 they established the first UNESCO Chair on Research and Education in Asia (with 2017 marking the 10th anniversary), and in 2014

hosted the 9th Global RCE Conference. He explained that this First RCE Thematic Conference would showcase best practices and work – a good sign the range of participants covers many viewpoints and brings a wealth of insights. He also spoke about the field trips on the last day of the meeting – a chance for participants to see interesting sights within Okayama city and Maniwa city related to Sustainable Development (SD) and education. Mr. Makino concluded his address by expressing his sincere hopes for a productive meeting, reminding everyone of the importance and difficulties of the overarching task at hand, and that concrete steps to take in research and education to promote the SDGs must be defined. He called for everyone to work together to lead the way in the commitment to the SDGs towards a pathway to a better future.

Prof. Kazuhiko Takemoto (Director, UNU-IAS)

On behalf of the UNU, Prof. Kazuhiko Takemoto welcomed everyone to the meeting, gratefully acknowledging the co-organisers and co-hosts; RCE Okayama, Okayama University and the City of Okayama, before beginning his address.

The 2030 Agenda for SD was adopted by the UNGA in 2015, with the SDGs being its core elements. The international community has developed a wide range of activities towards achieving the SDGs. Education should perform a crucial role in achieving these. RCEs are in a position to reach these global challenges at the local level. Each community will take a different path to achieve these goals. This meeting will focus on three areas; namely Biodiversity, Climate Change and Sustainable Consumption and Production. This is in addition to the role of ESD. It is hoped that future thematic meetings can further the discussion on these areas, as well as explore a wider scope of the goals. UNU-IAS is committed to actively developing ESD as a vehicle to achieving the SDGs, with a mission to contribute to local communities towards addressing their specific needs around development through policy-oriented research and education and capacity development activities. Three years ago a global conference was held in Okayama, Japan, commemorating the closing year of the DESD, as Professor Abe mentioned. This global RCE meeting is regarded as its evolution. It is hoped the role of education to achieving these SDGs will be discussed. The UNU is committed to achieving this together with the RCE network around the world.

Prof. Takemoto concluded his remarks by wishing everyone a fruitful meeting through their active participation.

Mr. Masao Omori (Mayor of Okayama city)

Mr. Masao Omori thanked everyone for attending and welcomed all participants to the city of Okayama. He explained Okayama's endorsement of the UN's DESD and that based on the philosophy of the UNU, started an Okayama project leveraging the characteristics of the region to promote ESD. In 2016 they were awarded a UNESCO prize on ESD. Mr. Omori spoke about the government's responsibility to ensure a positive future for the region, and

that there were many challenges that need to be addressed based on the SDGs. He spoke about the importance of incorporating perspective on SD, drawing upon aspects of Buddhist terminology to understand capacity and what can be leveraged and enhanced. He also acknowledged that since 2005, they have learned a lot from their RCE stakeholders. Mr. Omori concluded his address by extending his gratitude to UNU-IAS, Okayama University and other stakeholders for the wonderful organisation and hoped it would be a very productive meeting for all of those taking part.

Congratulatory Messages

Mr. Masaaki Kobayashi (Senior Adviser, Ministry of the Environment, Japan)

Mr. Masaaki Kobayashi welcomed everyone and extended his gratitude towards all those involved in the First Thematic RCE Conference held in Okayama. He acknowledged the efforts of RCE Okayama, being one of the first RCEs in Japan and their ambitious work in academia, government, local schools, and within the community. He spoke about how climate change has been seen in many parts of Japan, along with the presence of more natural disasters. He then mentioned the Government of Japan's commitment to implementing the 2030 Agenda in an effective manner, and that even though the 17 goals are interlinked with one another, that education is the basis of all of the pillars. Mr. Kobayashi concluded his address by thanking organisers for their efforts and expressed his hopes for participants to engage in deep discussions towards achieving the SDGs over the course of the conference.