

OPENING REMARKS OF IGES INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP, FOREST CONSERVATION STRATEGIES FOR THE ASIA AND PACIFIC REGION

Kazuo MATSUSHITA
Acting Vice President, IGES, Japan

I. INTRODUCTION

Good morning, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to express my heartiest welcome to all of you for attending this International Workshop on Forest Conservation Strategies for the Asia and Pacific Region, hosted by the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies, or "IGES" for short.

My name is Kazuo Matsushita, Acting Vice-President of this institute.

I would like to talk briefly about IGES and its Forest Conservation project.

II. OUTLINE OF IGES

IGES is an international research institute which carries out policy oriented research and related activities to develop and formulate innovative policy instruments and environmental strategies for sustainable development ("Strategic Research"). The results of the Strategic Research are expected to be applied to a broad range of policy making entities, such as national and local governments, industry, NGOs and the public so that sustainable development can be achieved globally, inter alia in the Asia-Pacific Region.

IGES started its initial research activities here at the Shonan Village Center in Kanagawa Prefecture on April 1 of this year.

IGES is engaged in the following four areas:

- 1) Carrying out Strategic Research
- 2) Applying research results to policy decisions and actions
- 3) Training of researcher and policy makers
- 4) Disseminating and exchanging research information

IGES will implement six strategic research projects during its first phase of activities (1998 - 2000).

The first project is "Climate Change". This project will set forth policy tools in preparation for the COP 4 Climate Convention. It will also assist developing countries in addressing climate change issues.

The second project is on "Urban Environmental Management". This project

will present innovative ideas and models which will guide the urban environmental management policies in the next century. It will also put forth concrete strategies for environmental preservation of specific cities, in order to be incorporated in development assistance projects.

The third project is "Forest Conservation", which I will elaborate upon later.

The fourth project is "International Cooperation Environmental Education". This project aims to develop strategies to improve the quality of environmental education by presenting environmental education programs to the media, NGOs, industry, children, and educators. The fifth project is "Environmental Governance". This project will assist Asian countries in building capacity to overcome their environmental problems, and improve their policies on environmental issues.

The sixth and final project is on "a New Development Pattern". This project will redefine the quality and content of current economic development and propose a new development pattern for a sustainable society.

IGES has already built cooperative ties with 35 environmental institutes around the world. The institutes that have signed our charter include: 10 national administrative organizations, 4 international organizations, and 21 research and academic institutions. We hope to strengthen both research and personnel exchanges with these institutions.

III. OUTLINE OF THE FOREST CONSERVATION PROJECT

Needless to say, all forests are important not only for production of timber and other products, but also for conservation of bio-diversity, water generation and prevention of global warming. However, the natural characteristics of forests differ from place to places. Even for forests with the same natural characteristics, desirable management methods vary. This makes it difficult to conduct scientific and objective discussion of any alternative policies and actions based on common global criteria.

At the Earth Summit in 1992, forest conservation was recognized as a key environmental issues. Although, the Earth Summit adopted the Agenda 21 and the Forest Principles, which called for actions to prevent deforestation, it failed to convene a Forest Convention. After the Earth Summit, a number of international initiatives emerged, such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF), World Commission on Forests and Sustainable Development (WCFSD) and others, in order to find out possible solutions to halt worldwide deforestation and degradation of forest lands. At the Special Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations to Review and Appraise the Implementation of Agenda 21 (UNGASS), in June 1997, it was agreed that the work should continue to reach international consensus on forest conservation. The task to shape concrete action in the international community was forwarded to the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF) which was expected to finalize the direction of international solutions on this critical matter for the benefit of all human societies.

Also, at COP3 of UNFCCC held in Kyoto last December, forests were recognized as an important source of CO₂ absorption. However, in my view, due consideration should also be given to bio-diversity as well as to the conditions of local communities.

Against this background, an international agreement on forest conservation has to be reached through well-balanced measures, focusing on the transcending aspects of all societies recognizing its underlying causes of these transcendence and their relations to each other. An agreement should not be based solely on the forest sector or on the direct causes of deforestation. This discussion should be carried out with a wide range participation, including government and forest related sectors, as well as local residents and NGOs.

Comprehensive study on sustainable forest management has just begun.

Our research project sets the following two goals:

- 1) to prepare international strategies for conservation and sustainable management of forest in the Asia and the Pacific Region, and to propose necessary supporting legal measures and policies,
- 2) to propose basic elements to be included in a world forest strategy based on analysis and examination of forests including boreal forests.

The following four sub-themes were selected in the first phase of the project (1998-2000).

- 1) Structural Analysis of Regional Forest Destruction and Underlying Causes of Deforestation and Degradation.
- 2) Timber Trade Policy to Support Sustainable Forest Management
- 3) Participatory Forest Management.
- 4) Legal and Administrative Supporting Measures for Sustainable Forest

IGES has started a forest conservation research project for 1998-2000 working in cooperation with three researchers, two visiting researchers, and over fifty researchers in Japan and in the Asia-Pacific region. These researchers have various fields of speciality, and come from various sector and separate countries of the Asian Pacific.

IV. THIS WORKSHOP

The Forest Conservation project of IGES aims to propose international strategies to conserve and sustainably manage forests in the Asia-Pacific region. It also aims to propose legal and policy measures to implement such strategies. We are also analyzing and reviewing the state of forests in regions other than the

Asia-Pacific region, such as the forests in the Northern region, and aim to propose basic elements to be included in global forest strategies.

Although we just began our forest conservation project this past April, we knew through our earlier activities the importance of exchanging information and experience with other researchers and NGOs in Asia. That is why we decided to organize this international workshop. We would like to clarify the role of IGES through investigating the underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation, and through investigation of actual situations and problems that the countries under study confront now.

In this workshop, in addition to our project members, we have participants from the Forest Agency of the Government of Japan, ITTO and NGOs. Sixteen guests from nine countries have been invited to this workshop. With such diverse participants, and on the basis of your extensive knowledge and experience, I am convinced that this workshop will provide a unique opportunity to discuss the current status and direction of forest conservation in the Asian - Pacific region.

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the coming three days, we are going to discuss a number of important agenda items. I sincerely hope that the discussion and debated conducted during the workshop will yield significant input for the strategic research on forest conservation.

Thank you for your kind attention and I hope that you enjoy your stay at Hayama.