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Nobuo TANAKA

Let us move to Masuda-san.

Tatsuo MASUDA

Thank you very much Tanaka-san and thank you all for coming. I will be talking about the generational divide on the climate agenda. Climate change is the result of the accumulation of CO₂ emissions or greenhouse gases in the atmosphere well over the last 200 years. The Fifth Assessment Report in 2014 covered a long range, from 1750 to 2011. This is the magnitude of the period to cover. However hard we may try now, the effect may appear many years later due to its very long-term nature not necessarily benefitting the mature generations. Therefore, they may think, why they have to make efforts like hell if they cannot get the benefit of eliminating climate risks? This is a big and complex issue.

Already, climate change is eating into the heart of the system. Today and yesterday, an enormous typhoon has been hitting the heart of Japan. We call this Super-typhoon Hagibis. Seven million people were evacuated as a precautionary measure in the Central Tokyo area. Can you imagine seven million people have evacuated? Already, several people have died, and it is the largest typhoon to hit Japan over the last 60 years. This could also be the norm in the coming years.

Climate actions, mitigations in particular, are of a very long-term nature, because of the 200-year scale. Unfortunately, these are not appealing to politicians. I sympathize with politicians, because they face so many agendas, like employment, pensions, education, healthcare and building infrastructure. There are all these agendas, and because they are faced with the pressure of election and re-election, they like to shift their attention to rather short-term issues which they can sell to the voters. Quite often, the long-term issues could be set aside or left behind unless there is a room to accommodate all these demands.

However painful, we have to deal with climate issues, not setting them aside, and overcome the generation divide. There is a lot of criticism to what Greta Thunberg said at the UN Climate Summit. I saw many articles and videos in YouTube telling her, 'What you have said is brainwashed and exaggerates the climate risks.' However, this is not the way to persuade younger generations.

I saw many big speeches at the UN Climate Summit, big speeches gathering several hundred people or several thousand people. However, speeches do not mean anything unless they are underpinned by concrete actions. History shows a very sad record. For example, there was the famous Rio Summit in 1992 if you remember. Many heads of state came to Rio to make wonderful speeches and agreed upon an action-oriented declaration. They even discussed the need to decrease CO₂ emissions to 1990 levels by the end of the 20th century. But did actions follow? No, nothing serious happened. Rather, CO₂ emissions accelerated, because there was economic growth everywhere.

Serious decisions were taken in 1997 at COP7, where they agreed upon the Kyoto Protocol. But the Kyoto Protocol took eight years to be effectuated in 2005, because the signatories needed ratification by many countries. Therefore, well over ten years had passed with no actions after the Rio Summit in 1992. We should not repeat all these mistakes we made. What Greta said at the United Nations shocked me, because I was involved with energy policymaking, together with Tanaka-san and others, and I am partly responsible for that.



We have to do something real and we cannot leave all these younger generations behind or keep the generation gap wide open. We must narrow it, because we are responsible for the next generation and future generations. I am suggesting something very wild. Yes, our generation was challenged by this young girl from Sweden. That challenge should be responded to with sincerity and with concrete steps, on top of what we agreed upon in Paris in 2015.

How can the Japanese government respond to her accusation? Yes, Richard Cooper said no coal-fired plants, but my mother country is now constructing or planning 44 coal-fired power plants. This is because of cost issues and because economic growth comes first. It is natural for the government and industry to desire that option, but this is not the answer for the future generations. Regretting the past does not mean much. There should be a coordinated response to this young girl, representing the future generations. Let us do this at the 2020 UN Climate Summit, which should be observed by the entire population of the planet. This will be the first step to narrow the gap between us and the forthcoming generations. Thank you.

Nobuo TANAKA

Thank you, Masuda-san, for confessing our sin.