



**2009-10 UNEP Sasakawa Prize Award Ceremony
Speech
President of The Nippon Foundation: Takeju Ogata**

Honorable Ms Erna Witoelar, UN Special Ambassador for Millennium Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific, Executive Director Achim Steiner, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honor and pleasure to be here today to congratulate the winners of the UNEP Sasakawa Prize for 2009-2010.

To the two winning organizations—Nuru Design, and Trees, Water and People—I convey my heartfelt congratulations. Your innovative work to provide clean energy to those in need has received praise worldwide.

Since its inception in 1982 by the late Ryoichi Sasakawa, founder of The Nippon Foundation, the UNEP Sasakawa Prize has made great contributions in increasing global awareness regarding the environment.

I convey my utmost appreciation to the laureates, the jury, the selection panel and the UNEP Secretariat for making all of this possible.

The environmental problems that we now face are global issues. They affect every life form on this planet.

Over the 30 years that UNEP has been in operation, despite all efforts, environmental problems persist and are actually increasing in scale.

At the Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen last December, the issue of greenhouse gas emissions was taken up as a major topic. However, the conference was unable to reach a resolution.

There were probably a number of reasons for this outcome, but I believe the most important one was the opposing views of developed and developing countries. A resolution could not be reached, largely because the participating countries put national interest before collective environmental gain.

Countries have tentatively set reduction targets, but the fact remains that in every country, it is the national interest that receives priority. And cynicism regarding these targets is made plain by the fact that those nations that have done a good job in keeping emissions low will actually be able to sell emissions rights to countries that have spent the past few years ignoring their targets. This gives an ugly new meaning to the term “eco-business.”

Looking at this, I cannot help but feel that the current trends in environmental protection are building up a massive hornet’s nest. Our initiatives may be called environmentally friendly or ecological, but our motives all around the world are driven by profit.

The question is whether these activities truly benefit human beings and the earth. When compared with other forms of life, we humans have been given extraordinary abilities to transform our environment to cater to our needs.

We have come a long way down this path, and it is impossible to turn back. Today, there is a very real danger that, as we continue our technological advancements and pursue more comfortable and convenient lifestyles, we will inflict even further destruction on the earth.

When one looks at the earth from outer space, one realizes that human beings are merely one of many life forms living on this planet and that our very existence is dependent on the earth itself.

Over time, however, we have forgotten this notion and have started to believe that we can even control nature itself. I strongly feel that actions that alter the natural cycle of life and death should be beyond our permitted boundaries.

Of course, we must continue working to create global frameworks. However, given the wide variety of conflicting interests among the different nations, it will be difficult to find an effective solution to our problems in the near future.

Therefore, I would like to share one of my thoughts with you.

What we as a species need to do is to regain our sense of appreciation and humility towards nature and life. Then, on this basis, each of us must make that extra effort to suppress at least enough of our lust for convenience that we don't actually make the world worse than it is. We must do this for the betterment of ourselves, our families and our communities.

I am not offering such concrete proposals as that we should all stop using disposable chopsticks or decrease our energy usage. What matters most and foremost are each individual's mindset and attitudes.

If we can change attitudes and keep the world from actually getting worse than it is now, then I believe that we will be able to buy enough time that our environmental problems will one day be solved through our own wisdom, and I expect that our environmental problems will not worsen. And that negotiations between nations will find an effective solution.

But to achieve this, we human beings need to reclaim our sense of humility and work to attain a lifestyle that is in harmony with nature. This is what will protect us from the destruction of our environment.

In closing, I would like to once again extend my warmest congratulations to this year's laureates, and thank all those who have worked hard to make this prize possible.

Thank you.