

Speech on the Environment by Prime Minister Taro ASO

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1. The responsibility of the current generation

This is one of the islands which form the Republic of Kiribati in the South Pacific. I had the occasion to meet the President of this beautiful country at a summit meeting of the island countries of the Pacific (the fifth Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting [PALM5]) held in Hokkaido (last month). I should first like to introduce to you the solemn words that he told me:

“[We need] as leaders to offer life and hope to our people where there seem to be only despair and desperation.”

Kiribati's islands may be submerged by the sea and disappear because of rising sea levels caused by global warming. This is indeed a grave plea to the international community.

The world may sustain limitless damage from extreme weather and catastrophic floods if climate change were to be left unchecked. Preventing climate change is the responsibility of the current generation.

Today, I should like to share with the public Japan's responsibility and resolve concerning this subject.

The world has begun discussions on the creation of a new framework whose purpose is to prevent climate change. A major point of debate in this context is the reduction target of greenhouse gases (GHGs) for 2020, the so-called “mid-term target”. I should like to explain my ideas and decision on this mid-term target.

2. The decision process—a national debate

Reducing GHGs will have a substantial effect all throughout the daily lives of the public, such as on household finances and employment. Therefore, before taking my decision on Japan's mid-term target, I had experts analyse these effects in a comprehensive and scientific manner, including economic impacts. The results were the six options you see here, which were presented to the public and on which views were thoroughly sought.

Over ten thousand views were received through the public comments process, a very large number. We also conducted public opinion surveys and meetings for exchanges of views all around the country. I thank the many people who have given serious thought to this matter.

3. Three basic principles

There are three basic principles I should like to present.

(1) Participation of all major emitters and Japanese leadership

The first principle is on the participation of all major emitters, that is countries which emit GHGs on a major scale, and on Japanese leadership.

GHGs need to be reduced in the entire world in order to overcome the challenge of climate change. As indicated here, under the Kyoto Protocol, reduction commitments have been made by countries which emit only three tenths of the world's total emissions. This is as indicated in this pie chart. It is obvious that the forthcoming framework needs to include all major emitters including the United States and China, each of which emits 20 percent of global emissions. To achieve this, Japan needs to show leadership that sets the trend for the world.

At the same time, international equity, or fairness, is also very important. If stringent obligations are imposed on Japan alone, Japanese companies and factories will move to other countries with lighter commitments. This would merely mean that money and jobs move overseas and total global GHGs will not decrease.

(2) Making the environment and the economy compatible

The second principle is ensuring that the environment and the economy are compatible. We must not relax our measures to tackle climate change even in the midst of this once-in-a-century economic crisis. In order for our countermeasures against climate change to be enduring, it is critical that they should be made compatible with the economy. The mid-term target cannot stop at being a mere declaration; it must be something both well-backed and feasible.

(3) Achieving our long-term goal

The third principle is to ensure that we achieve our long-term goal.

The world's total GHGs need to be halved in order to stabilise the earth's temperature. This is as agreed at the G8 Hokkaido Toyako Summit last year. In order to achieve this long-term objective by 2050, I believe emissions need to peak by 2015 in developed countries and by 2025 in developing countries.

Japan has decided to make a 60 to 80 percent reduction of GHGs by 2050 its long-term target. The mid-term target I decided this time must serve as a milestone on the way to achieving this long-term target.

4. The mid-term target

I shall now turn to my decision on the mid-term target.

(1) A target that leads the world

Over seventy percent of views expressed through the public comment procedure supported an emissions reduction of 4 percent compared with the 2005 level. They supported the first of the six options. This is the reduction level which would be achieved by taking measures whose costs are comparable to those to be taken in Europe and the US. There were many voices of support for this option from the business community and labour organisations. Obviously, these views must be taken seriously.

But in order to lead the world in the low-carbon revolution, should we not have the resolve to step ahead and to make twice the effort? This is what I believe. And it is why I deliberately chose the target of a 15 percent reduction from the 2005 level.

Meeting this target would involve a greater reduction of emissions than the "14 percent reduction" option by boldly taking in contributions in the area of solar power generation and elsewhere. It is an extremely ambitious target which would aim to achieve a 33 percent improvement in energy efficiency. This level of improvement

would even exceed the 30 percent rise in efficiency at the time of the oil crises (in the 1970's).

On the other hand, if we were to choose an even greater reduction target, we would be in a situation for example where we could only allow the construction of houses with solar panels, or where we would have to continue giving out massive amounts of subsidies. Moreover, the public burden would be excessive. I, in a position of responsibility, cannot ask the public to accept such an option.

(2) Comparisons with Europe and the US

The Japanese target I decided goes beyond the mid-term targets of Europe, which stands at a thirteen percent reduction from the 2005 level, and that of the Obama administration of the US, which is a 14% reduction from the same year, as you can see in this chart.

Furthermore, the mid-term targets of Europe and the US will be achieved through a combination of reductions in the countries or regions themselves, emissions credits purchased from other countries, among other means. In contrast, Japan's target which I decided this time is calculated on the basis of energy-saving and energy-conservation efforts to be taken in Japan as well as of other domestic efforts. The target is of "clear water" efforts (literally *mamizu*, meaning net efforts), so to speak.

Additional reductions by Japan, such as those through emissions credit purchases and reforestation, were estimated to reach 5.4% under the Kyoto Protocol. I will decide on such additional reductions under the forthcoming (post-2012) framework after discerning the course of future international negotiations. This is the obvious thing to do in the course of negotiations.

Today's announcement on the mid-term target is an expression of Japan's approach to this issue. It is, so to speak, a first step towards fully-fledged international negotiations. The actual rules will be decided from now in these international negotiations. We will take part in them assiduously and ensure that Japan alone will not be placed at an unfair disadvantage.

(3) Technology transfer to developing countries

The response by developing countries is also a major point of debate. Ensuring compatibility between growth and the environment represents a serious challenge for developing countries, which seek to achieve high rates of growth. Short cuts should be found if they utilise the experience and accumulated knowledge of developed countries which have gone through many years of trial and error.

Developing countries should take their own action, and not merely attribute the matter to the “responsibility of the developed countries”. Japan wishes to contribute to global emissions reductions through the use of the energy-saving/ energy conserving and environmental technologies it has developed thus far. Japan shall not refrain from providing technical assistance to those developing countries which take part in the new (post-2012) framework in a manner which shares the burden of responsibility.

(4) Path to the long-term target

Some may argue that the mid-term target announced today is insufficient to meet the scientific imperative.

It would be extremely difficult, however, to move along a linear path towards to “a 60-80% reduction by 2050” by merely utilising existing technology. The development and widespread use of innovative technologies yet to be seen is required.

We will make utmost efforts to develop and promote widespread use of innovative technologies and nuclear power. Analyses show that combining such efforts with the attainment of the mid-term target will lead to a reduction in GHGs by about a quarter by 2030 and approximately 70 percent by 2050. Thus this mid-term target will pave the way to attaining Japan’s long-term target.

5. The approach to achieving targets: responses to environmental challenges as opportunities for growth

Frankly speaking, this mid-term target certainly cannot be reached easily. Japan’s energy efficiency is already twice that of Europe and the US. It is the highest in the world.

Yet I do not subscribe to the view that “there is no further room to increase energy efficiency because Japan is already ahead in this area”. I recently visited a glass factory in a certain town. This small factory developed technology to remove air bubbles from glass in 0.5 seconds. Normally this process takes about a week. Energy consumption can be reduced by 60 percent through the use of this technology. This was made possible by on-site technicians making the most of their knowledge. Japan has enormous latent potential as seen in this example.

Now the world’s human resources, technology and funds are surging towards clean technologies. If we rest idle Japan will lose its superiority in energy efficiency and we will end up bequeathing to the next generation a country that lacks economic competitiveness, or international competitiveness.

I recently announced a new growth strategy based on the concept of creating new markets and jobs through the low-carbon revolution. In this strategy, I made clear the image of Japan’s low-carbon revolution and the way to bring this about, such as:

- (1) raising the level of new energies and renewable energies such as hydro power to 20 percent, the highest level in the world;
- (2) a “Plan to be the Number One Solar Power Nation in the World” according to which solar power generation will be increased to twenty times of current levels;
- (3) a “plan to make eco-cars widespread faster than in any other country in the world”, under which every other new car will be an eco-car, such as a hybrid car.

We took the first step forward with the supplementary budget of fiscal 2009. For example, resources were secured for providing up to 250,000 yen in subsidies when a used car is replaced with a new eco-car, and offering eco-points upon the purchase of energy-saving home appliances.

6. *The Burden to be borne by the public*

However, in order to achieve this target, there are burdens that the public must be asked to bear.

I believe it is irresponsible to the public just to repeat the mantra of “the greater the emissions reductions, the better” without indicating the extent to which the burden will have to be borne in people’s daily lives and in industrial activities. For that reason, here I would like to state quite frankly what the public’s burden will be.

Here is a set of estimates on the public burden. In selecting the mid-term target, we have no choice but to request that the public bear the concomitant burden.

Of course, the government must make all possible efforts to reduce this burden, and it is resolved to do so. We must also ask the business community to strive for and bear the burden of further technological development.

Nonetheless, this is a cost of protecting our Earth. I truly believe that Japan must tackle the climate change issue with this firm belief.

As you can see here, in recent public opinion polls, after becoming aware of these burdens, nearly half the people surveyed supported a reduction of 14% from the 2005 emissions level, a reduction very close to the target I have stated. I should like to express my deep respect for the sound judgement of the public.

With unwavering resolve, I will continue to strive for the creation of an effective international framework that leads to a veritable resolution of the climate change issue so that your efforts and cooperation will not come to naught.

In conclusion: My request to the public

The ambitious target I have chosen is one that will be impossible to achieve through the efforts of the national government alone, no matter how hard it tries.

Ordinary citizens, industry, labour, the national government, and local authorities—we all have to take actions in full cooperation to bring about a low-carbon revolution, including the transformation of our lifestyles and our industrial structures. This is also for the benefit of Japan itself, as it relies almost totally on foreign countries for its supply of most kinds of resources and energy.

Last week, I spoke via monitor television to Mr Koichi Wakata, the astronaut who is currently working aboard the space station "Kibou". He said that the Earth sparkles beautifully, shining blue amidst the pitch blackness of space.

The Earth, and future generations, now stand at a critical juncture.

Those of us alive today have a responsibility to preserve our beautiful Earth for future generations and pass it on to them.

Shall we not become “the generation that saved the future” so that children in generations to come can look back on history and say, “That was the era when they achieved the low-carbon revolution and protected the Earth for us”?

I ask once more for your understanding and cooperation.