

The 10th Asia-Pacific Cooperative Ministers' Conference
Draft Representative Speech by
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(Time available for speech: 15 minutes)

Opening

Chairperson, fellow representatives, and ladies and gentlemen:

First of all, I would like to express my sincere respect and gratitude for the Government of Vietnam, the International Cooperative Alliance Asia Pacific (ICA-AP) regional office, and the Vietnam Cooperative Alliance (VCA) that have worked so hard to prepare for this conference.

I am truly honored to attend this conference as the representative from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of Japan. As a member of the Asia-Pacific region, we also really look forward to closely exchanging views and opinions with you.

I would like to stress that the role played by agricultural cooperatives in the Asia-Pacific region is very important in order to “end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture” which is set as the second goal among 17 SDGs.

First of all, let me start with introducing the roles and current activities of the agricultural cooperatives in Japan.

The role and status of cooperatives of Japan

The Japanese agricultural cooperative system was established in 1947 as the autonomous cooperative organization of farmers so that small-scale farmers could become economically independent.

The missions of the agricultural cooperatives are to improve agricultural productivity, increase agricultural income, and develop regional agriculture, as well as to take measures for improving rural life, environment and food.

More specifically, the agricultural cooperatives comprehensively provide services necessary for life, such as joint distribution of agricultural products, joint purchase of production materials, management of common facilities, management of processing facilities, purchase of daily commodities, provision of welfare services, acceptance of savings deposits and lending of money (credit business), and provision of mutual-aid business, not only for farming by members, thereby playing a major role in improving socioeconomic status of farmers.

Today, nearly 1,400 groups and approximately 4.5 million farmers (regular members) belong to the agricultural cooperatives. Like this, the agricultural cooperatives plays important role in the field of distribution of agricultural products and materials, finance and mutual aid.

On the other hand, seventy years have passed since the establishment of the agricultural cooperative system, and the environment surrounding agriculture and rural communities have largely changed.

Seventy years ago when the agricultural cooperative system was established, Japan's issue was to distribute agricultural products equally to people by increasing production of agricultural products, basically reflecting shortage in food supply. Now, however, what is important is how products should be distributed, as the changes and diversification of eating habits progress.

As to the condition of farmers, the Japanese agriculture seventy years ago was supported by many, small-scale farmers. Now, farmers are separated into large-scale (full-time) playing farmers and small-scale part-time farmers, reflecting aging and decrease in the number of farming people.

Due to these changes, the Japanese agricultural cooperatives need to show their originality and ingenuity, and to formulate marketing strategies that can respond to the voices of consumers and actual demand, not simply gathering agricultural products and introducing them into the market. In particular, they are required to place emphasis on distribution of agricultural products and supply of production materials that respond to voice of producers.

For this reason, the agricultural cooperatives are now tackling reforms to respond to such change of the times and changes in needs, and the Japanese Government intends to consistently support their efforts.

International Cooperation of Japan

The activities of agricultural cooperatives will play an important role in increasing food production and realizing sustainable agriculture through the self-help efforts of developing countries, as well as in improving rural life.

In light of the significance of these activities of agricultural cooperatives, Japan has contributed to ICA funds for fostering human resources for 30 years from 1986 to the present. Last year, these funds were used for the programs of ICA-AP and the training organization of JA-ZENCHU (Central Union of Agricultural Co-operation)(*) to foster core leaders of agricultural cooperatives, union leaders for rural women, and human resources who can contribute to reinforcing the business operations of agricultural cooperatives mainly in developing Asian countries.

*Institute for the Development of Agricultural Cooperation in Asia (IDACA)

Conclusion

On this occasion, I would like to mention Japan's international cooperation in the field of agriculture, forestry and fisheries.

Moreover, Japan has taken initiatives from launching to putting into practice the APTERR (ASEAN Plus Three Emergency Rice Reserve) and the AFSIS (ASEAN Food Security Information System) within the framework of the AMAF (ASEAN Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry) + 3), consisting of 10 ASEAN member states and the agricultural and forestry ministers from Japan, China and Korea, and will sincerely continue to take these initiatives in the future.

Japan has especially utilized the APTERR to provide rice support to the Philippines (240 tons) and Cambodia (210 tons), which was referred to by Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the ASEAN Plus Three Summit last year.

Thus, as a part of the Asia-Pacific region, Japan is willing to proactively work with other countries to develop this region.

Lastly, we truly expect that the ICA will play its roles to the fullest extent in reinforcing and promoting cooperative activities around the world, and that further development of cooperative movements in each country will be realized through these activities.

We also expect the ICA-AP to continue efforts to resolve problems facing cooperatives in the Asia-Pacific region with their historical experiences and expertise.

Thank you very much for your attention.