

Opening Remarks

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President, JIRCAS

Distinguished guests, participants, ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the symposium organizers, I have the honor and great privilege to open the JIRCAS International Symposium 2014. Soil Environment and Crop Production: Toward Stable Crop Production in Developing Regions, which is organized by the Japan International Research Center for Agriculture Sciences, JIRCAS and co-organized by the Japanese Society of Soil Science and Plant Nutrition, with kind support of Research Council Secretariat of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, and the National Institute for Agro-Environmental Sciences as well as Japan Forum on International Agricultural Research for Sustainable Development.

First of all, I would like to extend my cordial welcome to all guests and participants, particularly those who came from overseas. I would also like to express my sincere thanks to our prominent keynote speakers; Dr. William Dar, Director General of International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics, ICRISAT, and Dr. Takashi Kosaki, Professor at Faculty of Urban Environmental Sciences, Tokyo Metropolitan University, for their kind acceptance to deliver very relevant lectures in this symposium. Dr. Kosaki is also President of the Japanese Society of Soil Science and Plant Nutrition and the co-organizer of this symposium. I would also like to extend my appreciation to the other speakers, chairs, and the discussants in the sessions to follow today.

Climate change and rising food prices are all still serious problems in many parts of the world. For this reason, recognizing the increasing importance of technology development is a key to increase the productivity and stable production of agricultural products in the tropics and other unstable environment. This approach would help reduce malnutrition in developing regions and improve global food security.

Solutions to problem related to soil environment, health and fertilizer, which are indispensable for crop production, are urgently needed, particularly in areas like Africa where unstable environments that limit productivity are widely distributed. Following the Tokyo International Conference on African Development, TICAD V of the last year, and ahead of the International Year of Soils 2015 of United Nations, we recognize that tracking those problems is an urgent matter. Our life and ecosystem depends on soil health which is surface of this earth, top 20 centimeters.

In this symposium, topics focusing on the improvement of nitrogen and phosphorous use efficiency as well as countermeasures against salinity, which is another problem, will be discussed by researchers and specialists in a comprehensive manner, not only from the aspect of soil science or plant nutrition but also from that of crop breeding or crop improvement.

JIRCAS, with its mission to improve agriculture technologies in developing regions, started its third medium-term plan in April 2011 and three new research programs were established. Last year's JIRCAS symposium focused on the Rural Livelihood Improvement Program. For this year's symposium, we focused on other two programs, namely the Environment and Natural Resource Management Program and Stable Food Production Program.

Today's discussion, therefore, will include our relevant research activities in Africa and Asia, including those carried out by us in Tsukuba and Ishigaki here in Japan. At JIRCAS, we endeavor to keep our research program timely and relevant to address important global issues which are changing continuously. We hope that this symposium would become a good opportunity for sharing our research outcomes in order to find a new direction for our partnership for stable crop production in developing regions.

Finally, I would like to extend my sincere hope that with your precious contributions this symposium will be fruitful and will achieve the objective for which it was organized. Thank you very much.