Inaugural Address

Keiji Kainuma

Director General, JIRCAS

Distinguished Guests, Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Symposium Organizing Committee, I have the honor and privilege to open the 4th international symposium on "Biosafety Results of Field Tests of Genetically Modified Plants and Microorganisms".

Above all, I would like to extend my cordial welcome to all the guests and participants, in particular to those who have come to Japan from abroad.

On this occasion, I would like to introduce the research activities of JIRCAS. JIRCAS is engaged in two types of activities. First, approximately 40 research scientists on a long term basis are dispatched each year to overseas research institutions located in the developing regions to conduct collaborative research work on various subjects relating to agriculture, forestry and fisheries.

In addition, to support these activities, JIRCAS has consolidated the structure of research at the Center in Tsukuba and at the Okinawa Subtropical Station by promoting advanced studies relating to biotechnological fields, computer simulation of selected biological and environmental processes as well as information systems.

One of the important activities of JIRCAS is to hold international symposia every year. In this regard, I am very pleased that the Advisory Committee selected JIRCAS which is located in Asia for the venue of the 4th symposium since the Asian continent accounts for more than half of the world population and arable land is becoming increasingly scarce or degraded.

Indeed, biotechnology could become an important method to increase food production within a sustainable level through the development of novel crop varieties with enhanced tolerance to biotic and abiotic factors, including various environmental stresses.

Although the effect of the development of such crops is likely to contribute to the preservation of the environment, for example by the reduction of the use of agrochemicals, it is equally important to ensure that the genetically modified plants and microorganisms do not become a risk to the environment, in particular human health. To achieve this objective, it is essential that the authorities concerned in the respective countries implement strict biosafety guidelines and that scientists in designated centers carry out a large number of field trials on these transformed materials, in particu-

lar to win the acceptance by the public of such products.

In Japan, as will be reported in the symposium, we have a limited experience in testing some lines of DNA-recombinant rice and other crops for resistance to diseases and pests in the field.

I am convinced that the discussions on the biosafety results of field tests of modified organisms and exchange of new information which will take place during the symposium will be productive and will contribute in the long run to the promotion of world food security.

I also hope that our friendship and cooperation will be further strengthened through our joint effort in reaching this common target of immense importance.

Thank you.