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Distinguished Guests, Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Symposium Organizers, I have the honor and privilege to open the JIRCAS International Symposium 2009 on the “Roles of Social Sciences in International Agricultural Research and Development”, which is organized by the Japan International Research Center for Agricultural Sciences (JIRCAS), in cooperation with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the University of Tokyo.

First of all, I would like to extend my cordial welcome to all the guests and the participants, in particular to those who came to Japan from overseas. I would also like to express my sincere thanks to the two prominent keynote speakers, Dr. Maximo Torero of IFPRI and Prof. Takashi Kurosaki of Hitotsubashi University, for their kind acceptance to deliver very relevant lectures.

As all of you might clearly remember, the high food prices in 2007-2008 and the world-wide economic recession following them seriously affected the economies of developing regions. It is reported that the reduction of the undernourished population, one of the UN Millennium Development Goals, has indeed become difficult to achieve. In response to this serious situation, the G8 Summit this year at L’Aquila, Italy, which followed the one held at Toyako, Japan last year, repeatedly expressed a strong expectation on agricultural development to achieve world food security. Roles of science and technology were also highlighted. In order to achieve world food security, however, we have to take various socio-economic aspects into consideration. All new kinds of agricultural technologies as well as all agricultural development projects must be evaluated socially and economically. This is the reason why this symposium was planned and prepared.

As most of you may be aware, JIRCAS is a unique research institute which aims at agricultural technology improvement in the developing regions. Limiting ourselves to technology development for example, there are many research issues which need to be tackled in combination with social, economic, institutional and policy studies. These include how to increase agricultural investments, how to disseminate appropriate technologies, how to mitigate climate change and so on and so forth. For this purpose, JIRCAS strengthened its socio-economic research group, currently named as Development Research Division, when it

was re-organized in 1993. Since then, various socio-economic studies have been carried out, not only in collaboration with other natural scientific fields, but also independently.

Generally speaking, social sciences dealing with agriculture have so far generated plenty of research results, making great contributions to the formulation of agricultural policies in the world and to the methodological improvement of rural development, etc. However, they have to play a more central role in providing effective answers to the challenges that we are currently facing on a global scale. In fact, the Consultative Group of International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) emphasizes the importance of policy and institutional studies, listing 'Policies for people' as one of the three major strategic objectives in the course of its Change Management Initiative.

This symposium aims to identify problems and indicate research directions in Social Sciences related to agriculture, such as the issues of globalizing economy, participatory rural development and technology evaluation, etc. by promoting the exchange of views among domestic and foreign experts, researchers and other participants. I sincerely hope that this symposium will provide significant and useful information which will contribute to global agricultural research and development endeavors as a whole, and to the resolution of complicated and persistent agricultural and rural problems in the world.

Finally, I would like to extend my special gratitude to the co-organizers and the supporters for their kind cooperation. Thank you for your attention.