

Joint Statement on Collaborative Research Actions based on the International Forum on Sustainable Future in Asia

The world is working towards the realization of sustainable societies within the framework of international commitments, including the Paris Agreement and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The National Institute for Environmental Studies (NIES) is undertaking a broad range of environmental research activities for a sustainable future in a transdisciplinary and comprehensive manner in conjunction with leading global research institutes and universities. To disseminate the outcomes of the research activities based on this research collaboration and to bridge the gaps between science and policy, in 2016 NIES initiated the International Forum on Sustainable Future in Asia in collaboration with The University of Tokyo and the Asian Institute of Technology.

As a step toward fostering a sustainable environment in Asia, the 5th International Forum on Sustainable Future in Asia was held on January 21 and 22, 2020, at Yangon, Myanmar. The Yangon forum was successfully co-organized by the Institute for Future Initiatives at The University of Tokyo (IFI, UTokyo-Japan), the Regional Resource Centre for Asia and the Pacific at the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT RRC.AP-Thailand), and University of Medicine 1, Yangon (UM1-Myanmar), with the participation and contributions by the Ministry of Health and Sports, Myanmar, other universities of medicine in Myanmar, and other academic/administrative institutes in Myanmar and neighbouring countries.

The forum initiated conversations and collaboration among members of academia, scientists, policy-makers, and various other stakeholders in the region to promote effective action to satisfy the goals of global sustainability and regional prosperity within the Asia-Pacific region. Recent research findings regarding the realization of healthy and sustainable societies in Asia were shared, and new ways of building such societies in Asia were elucidated by stimulating discussions among stakeholders. These discussions catalyse policy-research networking so that relevant science-based policies can be formulated and feasible pathways toward sustainable societies can be developed in Asia by converting aspirations into actions at the local, national, and regional levels.

In the Opening Session, Professor Zaw Wai Soe, Rector of UM1-Myanmar, gave a keynote speech endorsing positive steps and actions in support of the creation of a research network on environmental health effects. In addition, former NIES President and UTokyo Professor Emeritus Shinchiro Ohgaki introduced an integrative approach to design a sustainable environment in an uncertain world.

In Session 1, current environmental issues, health problems and research challenges in Asian countries were discussed in the context of ensuring healthy lives and well-being for future generations. Topics included air quality assessment, marine litter and microplastics, and water quality assessment. Session participants argued that smart

management and science-based imagination are essential, and collaboration with experts from diverse scientific areas as well as stakeholders needs to be prioritized.

In Session 2 synergetic strategies and sustainable practices to realize SDGs on combating climate change and protecting healthy ecosystems were presented and discussed. Case studies from Japan, Mongolia, and Myanmar were presented, and the scientific challenges in sharing knowledge and experience were discussed. Educating the next generation was identified as one of the most effective and just investments for our future. The overall importance of quality education for younger generations was also addressed.

Session 3 provided a wide range of the academic challenges posed by managing the transition to an SDG society under climate change. Scientific platforms and integrative policy-making processes to improve resilience against the rapidly growing risks of climate change were discussed, as were the transformation of existing cities and industries and the efficient use and protection of environmental resources.

Fifty-four posters were presented, and topics included heavy metals, air pollution, waste plastics, agriculture, water and the ecosystem, occupational hazards, local energy, and SDGs. The topics represent the enormous variation and academic range of research challenges related to attaining a sustainable and healthy future Asia. The many interactive dialogues that occurred during the poster sessions were enhanced by the coordinated flash presentations and demonstrated the excellent quality of the ongoing international collaboration and its potential in the future.

We believe the forum will continue to serve as a platform and foundation for a consortium of relevant institutions and governments in the region. These periodic gatherings of researchers and policymakers will facilitate the exchange of knowledge gained through research and catalyse dialogue at the policy–research interface in the spheres of environmental management and sustainable development in Asia.

We whole-heartedly appreciate the detailed preparation and contributions from professors, researchers, students, and officials in Myanmar. This forum will surely provide a launching base for extensive and sustainable additional collaborative research between scientists and others in Myanmar and other Asian countries, including Japan.

National Institute for Environmental Studies

Institute for Future Initiatives, The University of Tokyo

Regional Resource Centre for Asia and the Pacific, Asian Institute of Technology

University of Medicine 1, Yangon

At Novotel Yangon Max, Myanmar

Date: January 22, 2020