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The Global Warming Issue Reaches Boiling Point

By SUZUKI Keisuke

The 13th Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP13) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) will be held in Bali in December. How can we tackle global warming on a worldwide scale? How can the effects of reducing carbon dioxide emissions be maximized, and how much burden should each country bear? There will be a flood of events to discuss these issues, including the G8 Hokkaido-Toyako Summit next July, following the COP13 in Bali. It is probable that discussion on a framework for after 2013 when the Kyoto Protocol timeframe ends will reach its zenith in the next year or two. There is no doubt that movement concerning the issue of global warming will be a major international political theme in 2008.

In this regard, Japan is appealing to the international community by announcing the new policy initiative of "Cool Earth 50" which was proposed by the previous Abe administration. This initiative includes the plan that worldwide greenhouse gas emissions ought to be cut by half by 2050. I believe the thrust of this idea is correct, but would like to point out two things based on what I have seen at international and domestic arguments. This is because there is a major hidden risk to our future national interest and our global goal of tackling global warming.

The first point is that the plan to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 is little more than a long term goal. What I mean by this point is that, while the plan sounds good at first blush, those countries that are not enthusiastic about environmental issues would use the plan as an excuse to avoid action and then the proposal could end up taking on a somewhat less-than-progressive image if medium and short term targets or action plans are not introduced to achieve this long-term goal. Having a long-term goal could sometimes become the same as doing nothing at all. The fact that the plan has become a point of compromise without any particularly strong opposition suggests that in effect it may become an excuse for the delay in taking measures for global warming issue. Taking into consideration the recent image created among the international community that Japan is unenthusiastic about the issue of global warming, urgent steps

are all the more necessary from the viewpoint of securing our international influence.

One other point of concern is the phrase “common but differentiated responsibilities” that Japan adopts as its stance in international conferences. The original implication of this phrase should be that newly industrializing countries including China and India and such countries as island nations in danger of sinking or African nations at risk of drought and disease should be treated differently with regard to aid and the duty to take measures. However, this phrase is being used by newly industrializing countries at international conferences to insist on the difference in responsibilities between developed countries and developing countries. This could lead to the same mistake that occurred with the Kyoto Protocol, which ended up regulating nations that account for only 40% of the world carbon dioxide emissions. In order not to repeat this mistake, Japan proposed the idea of “common but differentiated responsibilities” as a way of separating out newly industrializing countries from those countries which bear the brunt of damage from global warming as well as those attempting to address the issue, rather than binding developing nations by one standard. Japan should reiterate the meaning of this phrase to the international community.

Japan has leading technology that can alleviate global warming and is one of the most energy efficient nations in the world – Japan is at the frontier of the field. We are also fortunate in having the G8 Hokkaido-Toyako Summit as a stage. Given such technological prowess on the issue of global warming and the fact that this is one of rare chances for Japan to lead the world, we have a duty to guide the debate in the correct direction. I hope that the Japanese government can implement strategic steps.

(This is the English translation of an article written by Mr. SUZUKI Keisuke, Member of the House of Representatives (Liberal Democratic Party), which originally appeared on the BBS "Giron-Hyakushutsu" of GFJ on October 23 and 24, 2007)