

**Speech by Ohno Shuichi  
at the UNEP Sasakawa Prize Legacy & UNEP 40th Anniversary  
Gala Dinner (February 21, 2012)**

Executive Director, Mr. Achim Steiner, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great honor to be here today to convey The Nippon Foundation's appreciation for the UNEP Sasakawa Prize.

The UNEP Sasakawa Prize has quite a long history. It was initiated in 1982, by the late Ryoichi Sasakawa, founder of The Nippon Foundation, to commemorate the 10th Anniversary of UNEP.

To date, a total of 28 individuals and 11 organizations have received the Sasakawa Prize for their outstanding contribution to the management and protection of the environment.

In the beginning, issues concerning the environment were not common household topics. After the awarding of 39 outstanding individuals and organizations, however, we can see how much the global community has changed. We now hear the terms "water/air/soil pollution," "global warming," "climate change," and "biodiversity loss" on an almost daily basis. This is ample proof of the incredible contributions that the long list of outstanding laureates has made over the years.

As representative of The Nippon Foundation, it has given me great pleasure to watch how this Prize has helped to increase public awareness and interest towards environmental issues. I convey my utmost appreciation to the laureates, the jury, the selection panel and the UNEP secretariat for making all of this possible.

Among those who have worked so hard for the Sasakawa Prize, we will be forever in debt for the contribution of the late Dr. Wangari Muta Maathai. As a jury member, Dr. Maathai helped bring sincerity and confidence to the prize. Her countless initiatives toward sustainable development made a great impact on the world. Dr. Maathai will always be remembered as a fearless social activist and an environmental crusader. She will be deeply missed by everyone.

I strongly believe that individual leaders like Dr. Maathai can push forward for the improvement of various environmental issues. It is obvious that public awareness towards the environment has increased. However, it is just the first step to solving the problems. The most important way to tackle these problems is through the actions of people. The power of civil leaders is essential in order to make people DO something by themselves for the nature around them.

Government and international organizations cannot change public actions towards the environment. No matter how governments discuss the problems, it would be too complicated to move forward because of conflicts of interest among countries. It is also challenging for the UN system to meet the Millennium Development Goals on environmental issues within 3 years. Therefore, governments with opposing interests or international organizations with glacial measures are not influential to changing the actions of people. If these top-down policies were effective, all the environmental problems would have been solved already.

Only individual leaders, such as the past winners of the Sasakawa Prize, are able to change the public's actions towards environmental problems by having been with the people, fought with them, and brought them assured improvements to their lives. Those leaders have earned public trust through their history of fighting environmental problems. It is time to realize once again that they are the ones who could overcome the various oppositions of interest and make people improve their environment by themselves. This will ultimately ensure the continuation of humankind in the end.

Thank you for allowing me to speak on this most auspicious occasion. Although funding to the prize from The Nippon Foundation has been completed, we hope that all the winners of the Sasakawa Prize will continue their good work with the UNEP under the leadership of Mr. Steiner.

In closing, I would like to once again extend my warmest congratulations to all the past laureates, and thank all those who have worked so relentlessly to make this year's event a success.

Thank you very much.