

**The First United Nations Environment Assembly
Opening remarks by Ryutaro Yatsu,
Vice-minister of the Environment, Japan**

Madame President, distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen. First of all, I would like to echo previous speakers to congratulate Mr. Madame President on the election as the President of this historical first meeting of UNEA. And I would like to express my sincere gratitude and wholehearted respect to the leadership of Executive Director Mr. Achim Steiner, without whom this UNEA would never have taken place.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my condolences for Mr. Matthew Gubb, who passed away on the fourth of May this year. Mr. Gubb worked tirelessly during his time as the Director of the UNEP International Environmental Technology Centre (IETC) located in Osaka, Japan as well as laying the groundwork for the Minamata Convention on Mercury. Building on his work, Japan wishes to continue supporting the work of IETC and contributing to the world's environmental efforts through its environmental technologies.

At this first UNEA meeting, it is very timely that the high-level segment is scheduled to discuss the

Sustainable Development Goals. The development of SDGs was one of the key outcomes of Rio+20 together with the strengthening the UNEP. It is important that we set clear goals to build the low-carbon society embracing 3R and sound material cycle and harmony with nature at the global level toward sustainable future, and that all the countries take actions to achieve these goals and follow up on the progress. I look forward to concise and powerful messages from the high-level segment.

I also welcome the preparation of draft decisions on specific issues such as chemicals, waste, and air pollution that call for concrete actions. Especially with regard to mercury, I would like to thank, once again, all the countries and regions for their significant contribution to the adoption of the Minamata Convention last October. I call on each of us to work together with a sense of urgency to realize appropriate management and emission reduction at a global scale under this convention.

It is my sincere hope that this epoch-making assembly will yield meaningful outcomes that form the basis for global actions toward the sustainable future.