



THE SCIENCE COUNCIL OF JAPAN IS MAKING A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL AND OTHER PROBLEMS FACING THE WORLD.

The major metropolises of the Asian region are currently faced with grave problems such as pollution, slums and infectious diseases, yet they continue to expand unabated. A major conference to be held in Japan from November 10 to 12 will focus on the myriad issues confronting Asia's megacities, and search for possible solutions. This is the International Conference on Science and Technology for Sustainability 2004 – Asian Megacities and Global Sustainability; it will be divided into five separate sessions, including sessions entitled "Urban Material and Energy Use," and "Urban Sustainability and Safety." The participants at the conference will be leading scientists from Japan and abroad.

The conference will be organized by the Science Council of Japan, a Japanese academic institution which brings together scholars and academics from fields including the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences to discuss a wide range of issues. The council consists of 210 members, who are elected to represent the 760,000-strong Japanese scientific community. Its findings are announced both in Japan and to the world at large.

Professor Kiyoshi Kurokawa, President of the Science Council of Japan, relates, "The present world population has reached 6.3 billion people, a fourfold increase on 100 years ago. Because of the population explosion, the overuse of food, water and energy supplies, and the disposal of waste have become major global problems. Japan needs to turn its eyes away from purely domestic issues and get to grips with the problems facing the larger international community. The Science Council of Japan has been holding international conferences each year since 2000 on the theme of Science and

Technology for Sustainability, for the purpose of putting forward suggestions and proposals from an academic standpoint." The Science Council of Japan hosted the third Conference of the World's InterAcademy Panel, which focused on the theme of Transition to Sustainability, in 2000; in 2003 it hosted the International Conference on Science and Technology for Sustainability, which concentrated on the theme of Energy and Sustainability Science.

The Science Council of Japan established and participates in the Science Council of Asia (SCA), which is composed of representatives of scientific academies and governmental organizations from across Asia. The SCA seeks to secure a consensus for sustainable development for the Asian region.

Kurokawa points out that the Science Council of Japan has been actively involved in the search for solutions to the problems facing humanity largely as a result of the high expectations held of the academic community. "Since the end of the Cold War,

the world has been engulfed with such global problems as the environment, population growth and the north-south divide," he says. "No one country can hope to solve these problems alone, and conferences like the Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, were important in establishing a forum at which delegations from across the globe could gather for earnest and meaningful discussions. There has been a big increase in the number of such forums, accompanied by growing calls for the scientific community to put forward ideas regarding global issues. This is because the scientific community is able to propose policies which are formulated by taking a big-picture view of the situation, and it is free from national or profit-margin constraints; governments, on the other hand, inevitably place the highest priority on the national interest, while the private sector focuses on profit."

In recent years, such scientific organizations as the International Council for Science (ICSU) have certainly raised the international profile of the world's scientific community. Other important organizations include the InterAcademy Panel on International Issues (IAP), established in 1995, and the InterAcademy Council (IAC), which was



Professor Kiyoshi Kurokawa, President of the Science Council of Japan

members will be selected directly by the existing 210 members based on their individual merits." Other changes include reorganizing the previous seven academic fields into just three categories: social sciences, life sciences and engineering sciences. Jurisdiction over the council will be transferred from the Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications to the Cabinet Office. "I hope this combination of factors will greatly strengthen the hand of the Science Council of Japan as an institution that is able to propose meaningful government policies," comments Kurokawa.

Looking back over its long history, the Science Council of Japan has demonstrated its power of

TOWARD >A> SUSTAINABLE >FUTURE>



established in 2000 and which makes recommendations to the United Nations and the World Bank. The Science Council of Japan is a member country of the IAP Executive Committee and of the IAC Board, and is making a number of significant international contributions including collaborating in the reports "Inventing a Better Future" and "Realizing the Promise and Potential of African Agriculture," which the IAC has submitted to the United Nations.

The Science Council of Japan, which was originally founded in 1949, is presently undergoing a major revamp. "In April this year the National Diet passed the Science Council of Japan Reform Bill. One of the main advantages this has brought about is a new process for selecting members," explains Kurokawa. "Since 1983 members consisted of those who were recommended by registered member groups, and this led to misgivings that members were preoccupied with the interests of the groups they represented. But the recent reforms mean that from now on new

influence on a number of occasions, including impressing upon the government the salience of adopting the Three Principles of Atomic Energy Utilization for Peace, which resulted in their later incorporation into the Atomic Energy Basic Law in 1954. The Science Council of Japan also instigated a system of joint use for laboratories at state-funded universities, and pressed for Japan to participate in an international project to survey the Antarctic. Today's world faces problems of truly global proportions—what kind of solutions will Japan's scientific community propose? Not only Japan, but the whole world looks on with bated breath. ■ — SHIN'ICHI OKADA

FOR MORE INFORMATION >

The Science Council of Japan www.scj.go.jp/en/scj
The Science Council of Asia www.scj.go.jp/en/sca

Above, right : Scenes from the 16th International Congress of the International Federation of Associations of Anatomists (IFAA). The conference was organized jointly by the Science Council of Japan and the Japanese Association of Anatomists, and was held at the Kyoto International Conference Hall between August 22 and 27 this year.