

Shinzo Abe: Join Japan and Act Now to Save Our Planet

Contributed to *Financial Times* on September 24, 2018



Prime Minister Shinzo Abe giving a speech at COP21 Summit Meeting in Paris, the French Republic, November 30, 2015

Opinion: Unprecedented rain, heat, landslides and hurricanes show that time is running out

Unprecedented torrential rain and landslides ravaged the residents of western Japan this summer, killing more than 200 people, and ruining hundreds of thousands of livelihoods. Meanwhile, severe scorching heatwaves struck the country and resulted in approximately 160 deaths. Fierce heat also gripped

North America and Europe, and hurricanes and typhoons hit the US and Philippines.

Global warming increases carbon dioxide and acidifies the ocean, damaging its ability to self-purify. Even worse, proliferating marine plastic pollution threatens marine ecosystems and eventually, our own health.

The international community has taken steps to address climate change with forward-looking and long-term goals. An agreement was adopted in Paris in 2015 with the participation of all major economies including China and India. The following year, I went a step further at the Ise-Shima summit in Japan, as G7 members committed to devising long-term strategies.

Climate change can be life-threatening to all generations, be it the elderly or the young and in developed and developing countries alike. The problem is exacerbating more quickly than we expected. We must take more robust actions. And swiftly.

The way forward is clear. We must save both the green of the earth and the blue of its oceans.

Our goals must be firmly based on the latest scientific knowledge.

As we learn more, through the work and expertise of the scientists at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the entire world should take appropriate measures accordingly.

All countries must engage with the same level of urgency. Some are still increasing greenhouse gas emissions and emit more than 2bn tonnes annually according to the International Energy Agency. All countries must put promises into practice. Developed countries should provide support to developing countries for fulfilling their obligations.

As part of their long-term strategies, governments should promote innovation to drive new growth and spread the net widely for new ideas.

No alternatives should be excluded. Japan has goals such as creating ultra-high-capacity storage batteries, further decentralising and digitising automated energy control systems, and evolving into a hydrogen-based energy society. Countries should also rank the competitiveness of a company based on its development and dissemination of future-oriented technologies. This would encourage companies to invest for the long term.

Momentum is already growing in the private sector. The number of companies engaging in environment, social and governance-focused investment or issuing green bonds is rising dramatically. Japan's Government Pension Investment Fund is one of them. Investors now require businesses to analyse environmental challenges and disclose potential risks as well as opportunities.

We must also focus on reducing emissions from infrastructure. In Japan, our *Shinkansen* high-speed rail network prevents congestion and boosts the overall fuel efficiency of transportation nationwide. We also have set our carmakers a goal to cut the greenhouse gas emissions per vehicle they produce by 80 per cent by 2050 so as to realise "Well-to-Wheel Zero Emission".

We must simultaneously boost economic growth and reduce the use of fossil fuels. That means cutting the costs and improving the reliability of renewable energy.

In Japan, the volume of electricity generated from renewable sources has increased 2.5-fold in the past four years. Japan will host the world's first ministerial meeting focused on hydrogen energy. We cannot overlook safe nuclear power generation and controls

on emissions of methane and hydrofluorocarbons.

Manufacturers with large-scale greenhouse gas emissions should be encouraged to update their production methods. Countries should stop excessive steel production, which causes massive greenhouse gas emissions and creates imbalances in markets.

Finally we should tap data processing and communications advances to speed up the innovation cycle. Investing in energy transition and the sharing economy will ensure economic growth and dramatically reduce greenhouse gases.

Addressing climate change, marine pollution, and disaster risk reduction are critical pillars for achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Japan will preside over the G20 next year and focus on accelerating the virtuous cycle of environmental protection and economic growth.

When the seventh Tokyo International Conference on African Development is held in Japan, we will extend support to African countries. We invite the rest of the world to join us in tackling this tough challenge. *

The writer is prime minister of Japan