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# Opening Remarks

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**KOYAMA Osamu**

President, JIRCAS



Distinguished participants, good afternoon. It is my great honor to open the JIRCAS International Symposium 2023, organized under the auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and the Forestry and Forest Products Research Institute.

On behalf of JIRCAS, the organizer, I would like to thank today's distinguished guests, Mr. KOSAKA Zentaro, Deputy Director-General of the Forestry Agency, and Dr. NAKASHIZUKA Tohru, Director General of the Forestry and Forest Products Research Institute; today's keynote speakers, Prof. KITAJIMA Kaoru, Vice Dean of the Graduate School of Agriculture, Kyoto University, and Dr. Sonya Dewi, Director of Asia Program of CIFOR-ICRAF; and all the distinguished speakers for the two sessions for their strong support and enormous contribution to this symposium. I would also like to thank all of you who are attending today's symposium, both online and on-site here, for generously taking your precious time to join us.

Tropical forests, which account for an estimated 40-50% of terrestrial vegetation, contribute to the stabilization of the global system through their ability to absorb and store carbon, a vital function for the survival of human society in the face of the climate crisis, as well as through their multiple functions, including biodiversity, disaster prevention, water resource conservation, timber production, and even cultural formation. However, the relentless overexploitation of natural resources and the conversion of tropical forests to farmland continue unabated.

Deforestation and forest degradation caused by human economic activities contribute to global warming through the release of carbon stored in trees and soils, and to the loss of biodiversity through the destruction of ecosystems. And these feedback loops may result in the malfunction of global climate and environmental control system, potentially leading to the disruption of the entire "Earth system". In recent years, international conferences and negotiations on climate change countermeasures and biodiversity conservation have emphasized the need for resource management that strengthens the climate and environmental regulation functions of tropical forests, as well as the need for rules to control deforestation associated with the forest industry. The functions and resources of tropical forests are indispensable assets to our society, therefore their conservation is important. However, the socioeconomic activities associated with industries using tropical forests are equally important.

I believe achieving both is the key for preventing deforestation and forest degradation. To this end, we need to create holistic and inclusive innovations that will lead to both the conservation of the environment and the realization of sustainable forest and forest-related industries. This is the reason

why we selected the title of this year's symposium.

JIRCAS plays a central role in international collaboration in agriculture, forestry, and fisheries research, and aims to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs through the development of technologies to address various challenges in the Asia, Africa, and Latin America regions. As a part of these efforts, we are promoting international collaborative research and cooperation in tropical forests and forest industry, mainly in the Asian region. We are conducting research projects which include social implementation of research results for the people who live on tropical forests, for example, the projects titled "Evaluation of genetic resources for strengthening productivity and adaptability of tropical forests", or "Strengthening tropical forest resilience based on management and utilization of genetic resources capable of climate change adaptation", or "Sustainable replantation of oil palm by adding value to oil palm trunk through scientific and technological innovation" and so on.

In today's symposium, distinguished tropical forest researchers from Asia and around the world will present and discuss the opportunities and challenges of balancing tropical forest resilience and forest industry sustainability. This year marks the 50th anniversary of Japan-ASEAN Friendship and Cooperation, and we hope that focusing on tropical forests in Asia will lead to innovations from ASEAN countries that can contribute to our common goal. Furthermore, this year marks the 30th anniversary of JIRCAS's reorganization. JIRCAS started using the current name in October 1993 when it was reorganized from its predecessor, the Tropical Agriculture Research Center. The Forestry Division in JIRCAS was structured at that time, so this symposium is being held in this commemorative year.

I sincerely hope that with the active participation of all the attendees, this international symposium will become a place for valuable information exchange and lively discussion. Together, let's move towards a future where tropical forests thrive, and sustainable industrial practices ensure the well-being of local people who live on tropical forests and our planet.