

Text of the Welcome Speech by President ITO Kenichi of JFIR at the Welcome Dinner for the participants of the NEAT Working Group meeting on “East Asian Food Security” held in Tokyo on July 1, 2009

Tokyo, July 1, 2009

Prof. OHGA Kenji, Director of the Working Group on “East Asian Food Security,” Dr. Aris ANANTA, Senior Research Fellow of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies of Singapore, and all other participants of the Working Group, Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to welcome you all to the first meeting of the Working Group on “East Asian Food Security” to be held full day tomorrow under the intellectual initiative of NEAT, the Network of East Asian Thinktanks.

We still vividly remember how the food prices soared in the world market until the middle of last year. Though the financial crisis which struck the world economy last September somewhat calmed the food markets for the time being, it remains to be a fact that the strong demand for food as well as biofuels remains potentially threatening just as magma is under the dormant volcano. We should not forget that we are sitting on a volcano.

Thailand and Vietnam are exporters of rice, whereas Indonesia, Laos and the Philippines are importers. Japan, China and Korea are self-sufficient for the time being. However, we must be aware that, if the food security is not guaranteed, it could quickly develop into the most serious threat to the daily life of millions of millions of the population in the region. No country will be able to solve the problem alone. We must organize various efforts to develop the regional cooperation in food security as quickly as possible.

And, in this context, the Working Group which will meet tomorrow will be, even if a small, a steady step forward to contribute to the building of such a system of food security in the region. I am confident that under the leadership of Prof. OHGA this will be a successful Working Group meeting and will add much to the success not only of the NEAT Annual Conference in August in Seoul but of both the ASEAN Plus Three Summit and the East Asia Summit.

Thank you very much.