

KAZE, October 2019

Four years after the Paris Agreement

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The landmark Paris Agreement, adopted on 12 December 2015, is the first legally-binding framework regulating all Parties related to climate change issues. It urges all humankind to take prompt actions to avoid a serious climate crisis. This is innovative in that the international community finally agreed to decarbonize itself and make a historic transformation of the current social and economic systems by mainstreaming renewable energy.

Looking back, it is admirable that all parties agreed on this severe agreement at COP21 in Paris. The international community was probably forced to coordinate their efforts to tackle climate-change-induced extreme weather events taking place in various parts of the world.

Now, after four years of the adoption of the Paris Agreement, I would like to review changes and developments, both positive and negative, taking place during this period.

1. Seesaw struggle

Of various changes happened in the past four years, one important positive development would be the increase in the number of countries that ratified the Paris Agreement. It is amazing that the vast majority of 187 out of 193 UN member states ratified the agreement!

The second positive development is that the IPCC's special report on 1.5 degrees was publicized in October 2018, which clearly showed us the way toward the decarbonized society. The report says that we need to reduce CO₂ emission by 45% from 2010 level, otherwise the temperature will increase by 1.5 degrees in 10 years.

To achieve the 45% reduction, the report states that "Pathways limiting global warming to 1.5°C with no or limited overshoot would require rapid and far-reaching transitions in energy, land, urban and infrastructure (including transport and buildings), and industrial systems (*high confidence*). These systems transitions are unprecedented in terms of scale, but not necessarily in terms of speed, and imply deep emissions reductions in all sectors, a wide portfolio of mitigation options and a significant upscaling of investments in those options (*medium confidence*)."

In the meantime, business enterprises, citizens' groups as well as media all over the world started to take serious actions to tackle climate change. Moreover, political leaders of major countries, including President Macron of France, are emphasizing the importance of policy measures to address climate change issues. It is also noteworthy

that green parties are making a big leap in elections and/or opinion polls in EU countries.

In addition to the above, what probably is most important would be a series of movements that could be called "Greta's effect". At the age of 15, Ms. Greta Thunberg from Sweden started a "school strike for climate" alone in August 2018 to call for stronger actions on global warming. Her action sent ripples through the young people of all over the world and created a big wave of youth's climate activities which reached even the shore of Japan.

On the other hand, regrettably, the Trump administration's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement on 1 June 2017 would come the first one on the list of negative changes. Until now he has kept an extremely negative attitude toward the agreement while various positive movements are going on in this country by many local governments, citizen groups, and scientists.

President Bolsonaro of Brazil, taking the office in January 2019, is another leader who is negative in tackling climate changes. He is also criticized for his attitude toward the Amazon rainforest wildfires this year, but he does not change his negative attitude toward climate issues.

As it is, the global GHG emission has been increasing despite the Paris Agreement, and so is the level of CO₂, resulting in extreme weather various parts of the world becoming more serious year by year. It is reported that the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told that "Clearly, we are lagging behind" in the combat of global warming.

Also, in Japan, we see extreme weather events every summer, and damages of those heavy rainfalls and storms cost not only human lives but also caused tremendous economic and financial loss.

So far, national/local governments, as well as individual people, have been able to withstand those damages, but if big natural disasters occur every year anywhere on the Japanese archipelago, it will be a fatal blow to the aging Japanese society with low economic growth.

Prime Minister Abe repeatedly states that the major role of the national government is to protect the lives, assets and daily life of its nationals. However, we insist that the government should protect not only military security but also the security of life against climate crises. So far, the Abe administration has not introduced such important policy measures as carbon-emission tax or emission trading to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. He even defends coal-fired power generation probably under the pressure from energy-intensive industries.

2. A ray of hope for the future

The Paris Agreement requires an unprecedented level of social transformation and therefore the global community is now in the midst of a big sway. Amid social confusions all over the world, however, there seem to be a few signs of hope for the future.

I said so because a growing number of local governments, companies, and media are becoming serious about the climate crisis, and secondly even in Japan young people, although very few, join Greta's movement and are standing up against climate crisis. The third reason is that the current Japanese political situation under the Abe administration generated a young Minister of Environment. The 38 years' old Environment Minister Shinjiro KOIZUMI, second son of former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, is expected to bring a new perspective to the backward attitude of the government of Japan. Of course, what he could do as a Minister is still unknown, but I felt some sort of positive difference in Minister Koizumi's words and deeds from the past environment ministers. He said, "I thought that the role of the Ministry of Environment is to protect the natural environment, but I was wrong. The ministry administers issues of SDGs, meaning it deals with social transformation. The common language among global top-leaders is SDGs and Climate Change, but in Japan, they are not necessarily paid enough attention. I would like to fill the gaps between Japan and the world."

With a hope for the future, I will watch his performance as a Minister of Environment if he will have a real leadership to enhance government policy and propel Japan up to the global frontline in tackling climate changes.