

KAZE, January 2021

Can we wake to a new dawn after a long spell of darkness?

Saburo KATO

I am sure many people had a difficult time throughout the year 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some might have experienced a shortage of funds or lost their jobs. The pandemic is still active in the new year, and our ways of life have been gradually changing. We are not sure when the vaccine becomes affordable and if it works on various types of coronaviruses.

Amid such difficulties, we saw two positive changes in the political sphere in dealing with climate crises. One is the termination of the Trump regime in the USA, and the other is the launch of the Suga administration in Japan.

As you know, President Trump has been neglecting scientific data and rejected the Paris Agreement, the long-awaited international framework to tackle climate crises. On the other hand, the President-elect, Mr. Joe Biden places importance on climate policies and international cooperation.

In Japan, Mr. Shinzo Abe, after the record-long regime, stepped down last year. Mr. Suga, Secretary-General of the Abe administration, succeeded Mr. Abe as Prime Minister. Surprisingly, Mr. Suga, in his first policy speech, emphasized the need to shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy generation. He declared Japan targets the year 2050 to balance the GHG emission and absorption.

These remarkable events restored hope for the future energy/environment policies of the two countries.

At this moment (late December 2020), let me sort out the core points of climate policies in the two countries using the following table.

Statement of the Suga administration	President-elect Mr. Biden's commitment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GHG zero-emission by 2050 toward decarbonized society • "The global community recognizes that Japan has returned as an environmental leader. For Japan to survive, it is time to step forward and promote decarbonized technology to capture the market. (Env. Minister Koizumi) • Establish a 20 billion fund to promote hydrogen power generation and renewable energy generation • Improve the current target of the GHG emission in 2030 (26% reduction compared to 2013 emission) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global warming is the largest issue that human beings are facing (Statement during the election campaign) • Return to the Paris Agreement at once. Appointed Mr. John Kerry (former US Secretary who signed the PA on behalf of USA) Special Presidential Envoy for Climate. • A two billion dollars investment for four years to tackle global warming and create several millions of jobs. • Balance the GHG emission and absorption by 2050

If the two governments successfully implement these policies, other countries will follow. Then, our planet will be able to escape from the climate crisis in the end. However, the Japanese people will not swiftly change their practices only by Mr. Suga's declaration. He needs to design and implement quite a several policies, but that is not enough. Before anything else, he has to persuade people that carbon neutrality by 2050 is a must, however difficult it may be.

Achieving the goal of RE100 may not be so hard but require tremendous effort and costs for developing and controlling carbon-neutral technologies. Without people's understanding and support, Japan will not be able to give the result.

In the case of COVID-19 pandemic, people fully understood the crisis and therefore followed the instructions and rules. On the other hand, the environmental/climate crisis will stay for a long time, which requires patience and support for the government policy to tackle global warming. Coercive actions will not be enough. It is time for all of us citizens and NPOs to consider the ways to escape from climate/environmental crises. We need to be aware that, without

successfully combat the climate crisis, human society cannot survive in the future.