What is of the Greatest Urgency!

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Needless to say, the consumption of goods in our socio-economic system produces a volume of solid waste that is no longer compatible with the global environment in which natural resources are clearly limited. It is, therefore, urgent for those of us who inhabit the earth to reduce the volume of solid waste to a minimum by creating a system that promotes the recycling of reusable resources.

In the past, emphasis was laid upon consumer and administrative responsibility vis a vis solid waste management. Recently, however, the emphasis has shifted such that we should now ourselves meet the recycling challenge directly and head-on, under the control of local government.

The introduction of tariff system on solid waste collection and disposal may rapidly lead to a reduction in the volume of solid waste, this also under governmental control. Nor can preventive measures with respect to epidemiological diseases be left to mere individual responsibility. Here, too, governmental power must be strengthened. It is claimed that a tariff system concerning solid waste management will impose a further burden on the economic situation of ordinary citizens. But sanitation control must be implemented and maintained and there is, however, no evidence to support that claim. It will be necessary for manufacturers themselves to be responsible for the solid waste (including packing and/or parcel waste) produced at the stage of manufacture and delivery. To cover this cost, manufacturers may then raise their prices. Thus the arguments arise as to what is the most effective solution as between a tariff system and recycle considerations.

In the 1992 revision of the Waste Management Law, the Diet instructed the government to study and analyze waste management systems in other countries: to effect cooperative technology transfer with respect to solid waste management in developing countries: and to contribute to global environmental conservation. This recommendation may lead the government officials into a false and arrogant sense of superiority. I hope it is not so.

In the case of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake at least twenty nations immediately offered assistance. The rejection of such assistance, according to the officials, occurred because Japan was itself not prepared to deal with the situation, but I suspect that, instead, they really preferred to handle the disaster by themselves. In all probability, false pride, in addition to some political and bureaucratic issues, led to the rejection of overseas assis-
Japan did not wish to be categorized as a developing country. As a matter of fact, however, the International Solid Waste Management Association offered a symposium in conversation with the UNEP International Environmental Technology Center on Osaka, following the earthquake. Clearly, huge amounts of solid waste were generated by the Yugoslavian War, the Gulf War and in Lebanon and elsewhere. And the USA and Turkey successfully and fairly rapidly disposed of demolition waste following heavy earthquakes. Japan, in light of those experiences, is still at the level of a developing country. Japan, in rejecting foreign assistance, rejected the opportunity to learn about solid waste management from experts overseas who had such experiences, and so it seems to me that the 1992 Diet recommendation was not in fact put into practice.

The demand for disaster assistance and relief is global, and this demand is much more comprehensive and long-term than that is emergency human relief. UN and World Bank disaster assistance policies emphasize prevention and the solving of environmental problems.

Because the decrement, recycling and source recovery of solid waste are of world-wide intention, the Japanese government has tried to stipulate revisions of the present Law. But then the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake struck. That was of course tragic. Yet I should like to hasten to say that along going into a discussion of revision of present Low, alternative life saving measures should have been considered as soon as the quake occurred.

Our bewilderment over the complexity of our world and our awe at the disaster are put into perspective and brought under control by the necessity we face to solve both inherited problems and other problems of our own making. We know with our hearts and minds what is of greatest urgency.

References