Chairperson’s Greetings
Inaugural Symposium of International Network for Water and Ecosystem in Paddy Fields (INWEPF)

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Honorable Director General of Rural Development Bureau, MAFF of Japan, Mr. Hidesaburo Kawamura,
Distinguished Delegates from member countries and various International Organizations,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is really great honor for me to chair the Inaugural Symposium of the International Network for Water and Ecosystem in Paddy Fields. In addition, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude and special respect to the Japanese Secretariat of the INWEPF, the APO Secretariat, and other related persons of Japanese government who are devoted to holding this meeting successful.

An old Korean proverb says “Agriculture is the foundation of human life.” We admit that agriculture gives an important link between humans and nature. It plays an indispensable role in maintaining the balance of an entire nature, thereby sustaining human life. Long history of agriculture can not be described without describing the rice cultivation in paddy fields. Rice has long been the major food source in some part of the world, especially in Asia, since Bronze-age as written in the history book of agriculture.

Rice farming agriculture does not just supply food but also provides many other functions, such as preserving the environment and maintaining the regional traditions and cultures. It has multifarious functions such as flood protection, prevention of soil erosion, groundwater recharge, and water purification etc. The reservoirs and canals built for rice cultivation not only reduce natural disasters such as floods and droughts, but also conserve bio-diversity and beautiful agricultural sites, providing us with good amenities.

Paddy fields play the valuable roles of harmonizing human activities with the natural ecosystems. Aquatic ecosystem supported by rice cultivation has great diversity in paddy fields. When the spring comes and the field fills with water by irrigation, it becomes active with living creatures. Just before rice planting begins, the fields are vitalizing with water-borne life. When the summer comes and the crops grow, the fields continue to be an intense place for life, filled with various insects and other creatures. When the autumn comes, the fields turn to be a golden panorama with a bountiful blessing for all life forms. When the winter comes, the fields are an important source of
food for all various kinds of birds and also for some winter animals in the nearby mountains. That is because the grains dropped on the fields after the autumn harvest. What a great nature is with seasonal variation! Paddy is a field of life. It is the coexistence of human and nature.

According to the FAO statistics, rice is the staple food for about 59% of the world’s population. And, almost 90% of total rice harvest area of the world is in Asia. For the majority of Asians who eat rice, the grains accounts for a high proportion of total caloric intake. It is inferred that the experience and technology for rice production in Asia can be the basis of solving the food problems of the world for the future.

At Oxford meeting in 1997, ICID called the attention to the importance of rice production and irrigation system. Although irrigation in paddy fields was by far the largest application in agricultural sector, ICID had paid relatively limited attention to this subject. Taking this opportunity of INWEPF establishment, more attention and efforts are required to achieve our goal, and close cooperation with ICID is encouraged.

Most rice cultivation regions in Asia are affected by the monsoon climate. Precipitation is the most limiting factor in rice cultivation, particularly in rain-fed rice culture regions, since it requires large amount of water, e.g. 3,000 tons of water for one ton rice production.

World population is growing and industrialization is revolving fast. In proportion, the amount of water that we require is also increasing, putting further stress on the lack of water in areas where there used to be plenty of water, not to mention the dry areas where we initially lacked water. There is no alternative resource for water when we are short of it.

The amount of water that is necessary in agriculture depends on what crop we have as main staple food. Agriculture in the Asian region is focused on rice farming and must secure more water for agriculture compared to the other continents where dry field farming is prevalent.

Water management in agriculture is extremely important for any countries around the world. Without water, we cannot continue farming, and without farming, we cannot manage water in a sustainable way. That is why effective and sustainable development, management and preservation of water for agriculture pose as important tasks in the policies of all the countries around the world.

Each country can have different views on the function of agriculture because it has different policy goals and farming conditions. Therefore, we should not confine ourselves to a uniform solution that can be applied to all countries. We must guarantee the coexistence of different shades of agriculture and contribute also to sustainable development by seeking a realistic solution that can be applied flexibly according to the conditions of each country.
Exanding the basis of agricultural production is of paramount importance when it comes to improving the current status of food security in developing countries. To these countries, the way to increase food is to develop a certain amount of water that they need and use it effectively. And they need economic and technical support for this on the international level. The INWEPF may extend the support for the international efforts to help the agricultural development in less developed countries.

As Director General of Rural Development Bureau, MAFF of Japan, Mr. Hidesaburo Kawamura, mentioned already in his Welcoming Remarks, the INWEPF is established in order to address the so-called three challenges, “Food Security and Poverty Alleviation”, “Sustainable Water Use” and “Partnership”, recommended from the Ministerial Meeting on Water for Food and Agriculture at the third World Water Forum in 2003. The INWEPF aims at creating a flexible platform which enhances exchanging and sharing information and technology about water use and multi functionality in paddy fields and strengthening partnerships among member bodies.

Today’s INWEPF inaugural symposium will be started with keynote speech. Honorable president of International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage, Hj. Keizrul bin Abdullah will deliver his speech with the topic “Food production and irrigation water in the Asian monsoon region”.

Following the keynote speech and a short break, the session 1, which entitled “Multiple roles and values of agricultural water in paddy fields”, out of 4 major sessions including an additional special session will be opened. This session 1 will be coordinated by Mr. Daniel P. Renault, senior officer from FAO. Two speakers, Dr. David Groenfeldt from United States and Professor Nyoman Sutawan from Indonesia will present on the above issues.

Following the session 1 and again short break, an information session on FAO-Netherlands Conference on Water for Food and Ecosystem will be given. The FAO will present general information on the Conference and will invite the discussions about how the INWEPF contributes to the Conference.

These are brief outline of today’s agenda for the inaugural symposium. I hope that the sessions may provide good opportunity to share their knowledge and experiences between the speakers and participants through lively discussion. I humbly expect we could achieve a faithful direction to further development for INWEPF through mutual understanding and cooperation. Outcomes drawn out through INWEPF activities should be reflected to the policies on rural water development and management in national and regional level with a proper format, and one step further, delivered to the international water-related forum with a strong message .

Thank you.