10th Asia Smart City Conference "Yokohama Declaration"

Building smart cities aiming for carbon neutrality through city to city collaboration under the influence of COVID-19

(Trends toward Sustainable Cities)

1. We reaffirmed our commitment to international goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the New Urban Agenda adopted at the Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), and the Paris Agreement adopted at the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP21).

   Many cities have begun to adopt carbon neutrality as a basic policy for urban management. However, since low-carbon initiatives do not show progress overnight, mid- and short-term goals need to be set and specific initiatives implemented by applying the back-casting approach to long-term goals and flexibly reviewing these against changes in the macro environment. "Zero Carbon Yokohama", an action plan for global warming, developed by the City of Yokohama, has also been formulated and revised based on this concept. Similarly, more Asian countries are setting long-term goals for low carbon emissions, and engaging in specific initiatives and city to city collaboration to achieve these goals.

   Furthermore, with the growing interest in SDGs, over 100 local governments around the world have published their VLR, a voluntary local review of progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Japanese government has also expressed its positive support. VLR is expected to serve as a framework for encouraging the participation of regional stakeholders and regional innovation, and help cities become more sustainable.

(Urban Issues and the Direction of Actions)

2. Higher densities in cities have created a social environment that has led to higher productivity and higher income for urban residents, but at the same time, these have led to new urban issues that hamper sustainable development.

   The spread of COVID-19 has also further highlighted issues such as insufficient physical infrastructure, unequal access to core services, deficiency in the infrastructure system, and overpopulation.

   Under such circumstances, the participants shared the need to prioritize initiatives for creating sustainable cities that also contribute to the achievement of the SDGs and goals of the Paris Agreement and which are considered appropriate from the point of macro-environmental changes and cost-effectiveness.

   In addition, we confirmed that cities should aim for a good balance between achievement of the low carbon society and economic development, and that measures for low carbon can be an opportunity to enrich our lives, such as through green investment and by creating innovation and jobs.

(Potential of the Evolution of Solutions for Cities)

3. With the global spread of awareness of the importance of smart cities and the advancement of digital technology, there are increasing opportunities for the acquisition, linkage and visualization of data in cities, as well as for cities and the private sector to leverage these "open data" and "big data." This wider use of data should lead to more effective measures against COVID-19 in the short term, and environmental load reduction, improved healthy life expectancy, enhanced education, improved corporate productivity and the creation of higher-quality services in the medium to long term.

   It was also recognized that, in order for cities to address urgent urban development issues, we do not necessarily have to adopt cutting-edge technologies, but that smart solutions with a strong impact at low cost, which have been evolving in recent years, were also significant.

   Furthermore, there were positive discussions not only on these technological advances, but also on the possibility of the proposal made on a new business model for the overseas development of cities as a total package which includes lifestyle and other intangible aspects, such as City Management as a Service (CMaaS), which may contribute to urban development in Asia and other emerging countries.

(Participation of New Players in Urban Development)

4. In addition to public organizations and large companies that have long played an important role in building sustainable cities, the importance of having more participation by new players such as startup companies and universities was recognized at the conference.

   In the era of Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity (VUCA), startups are emerging, one after another, that propose new technologies and solutions worldwide, and their presence is growing in areas of smart cities and sustainability. In future, collaboration with startups will become indispensable in all aspects of urban development.

   In addition, from the perspective of fostering future leaders and generating new ideas, it is noteworthy that exchanges between universities are advancing in Asian countries. How the advanced research and new ideas from universities can be incorporated into actual urban development will also become more important for enhancing the attractiveness of cities.

(Evolution of the City to City Collaboration)

5. In addition to inter-governmental cooperation and technical cooperation between individual companies, advanced discussions were also held on the potential of new city to city collaboration, not limited to Asia. The economic development of Asian countries in recent years has been remarkable, and we see many cases in which leading local private companies in the countries take the lead in urban development, on behalf of local administrative agencies. Therefore, city to city collaboration in the future development of smart cities needs to ensure that the private and public sectors in the cities cooperate more closely in promoting the projects.

Furthermore, considering the ongoing efforts around the world towards smart cities, Japan will need to cooperate, not only with Asian cities, but also with other cities in Europe and elsewhere, in future. This is an era in which cities work together beyond regional boundaries, aiming for further advancement, by leveraging their mutual strengths in areas such as decarbonization, circular economy, next-generation mobility and citizens' well-being. The Asia Smart City Alliance (ASCA) which was established based on a proposal at the Asia Smart City Conference, is able to play a key role in city to city collaboration as a platform for promoting cooperation in information sharing.