

Opening speech given by Mr Yohei Sasakawa at The Nippon Foundation-
GEBCO Seabed 2030 Event: From Vision to Action
October 22 2019, The Royal Society, London, UK.

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Before I begin, I would like to express my deepest condolences for the loss of Sir Anthony Laughton. He was the person who had initiated the Nippon Foundation's long-standing relationship with GEBCO. He had also played an instrumental role in the establishment of the training program at the University of New Hampshire. I hope that we can continue in his footsteps in making great strides in mapping the world's ocean floor with the contribution from the young generation of ocean mappers we have nurtured.

So now, I would like to begin by asking you this question.

Have you ever wondered how the earth would look like if we removed all of the water from its surface?

As a young boy, having read Jules Verne's novel "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea", my imagination took me to wonder what lies beneath the ocean. In the nineties, I had a chance to ride in a submarine to a depth of two thousand meters. It was a very modest sized vehicle with only one seat for the pilot. I crouched in the small space in between the legs of the pilot and

watched in awe the world beneath the ocean that I had dreamt of. With Mozart's Piano Concerto playing in the background and marine snow fluttering at a short distance before my eyes, the experience of diving deeper into the ocean was inexplicably profound.

So, what I wanted to say in short is that there is a world full of wonders right beneath our feet.

The sad truth is that for the past century or so, we humans have been too occupied dreaming about what lies above our heads rather than what lies beneath our feet. This is illustrated in the fact that when we started the project, we knew about the entire surface of Mars, but we only knew as little as six percent of the world's ocean floor.

Finding out about the ocean floor is not simply for the fulfilment of our desire to explore a frontier that still remains largely unknown. The information about the ocean floor holds much potential for the future of our planet and for humanity. Among many others, knowing the shape of the seabed contributes to safe navigation of ships, identification of marine habitats and prediction of tsunami propagation as well as of the rise in sea levels.

With this in mind, we at the Nippon Foundation felt that it was our duty to humanity to help push forward the initiative to map the world's ocean floor. In 2004, the Nippon Foundation together with GEBCO had established a

training program at the University of New Hampshire to raise a new generation of ocean mappers. To date, 90 fellows from 40 countries have successfully completed the program. Then, with a grand vision to map the entire ocean floor of the world, we had established “The Nippon Foundation-GEBCO Seabed 2030”.

The project was quick to gain momentum with many governments, research institutions and private entities promising their cooperation.

Gathered here today are many partners and supporters of the project who have contributed in pushing it forward.

I would like to thank all of you who have shared our vision.

Having said that, we mustn't forget that there is still a long road ahead to reach our goal of mapping one hundred percent of the world's ocean floor. In working towards attaining this goal, there are three areas of focus that I would like to propose for further consideration.

The first is facilitating the mapping of unexplored areas of the world.

There are still large areas of the world where no mapping has been carried out. I believe that it is vital for us to seek cooperation from both public and private sectors to facilitate mapping in these remote regions.

The second is collecting data through crowdsourcing.

In order to speed up the collection of data we need a larger number of participants. It may thus be useful to put in place a means by which even those with little or no expertise in this field could easily participate in the collection of data.

The third is advancing technology for data collection.

As many of you know, the GEBCO-Nippon Foundation Alumni Team had earlier this year won the Shell Ocean Discovery XPRIZE competition - a competition aimed to instigate innovation for unmanned exploration of the deep sea.

Through participation in this competition, the team was able to successfully build a solution which enabled rapid unmanned collection of data at a depth of 4,000m, changing the boundaries of what is possible. To improve the efficiency at which data is collected, I believe that not only do we need unmanned solutions such as the ones that had been developed during the XPRIZE competition but we also need to come up with technology that allows for the wider public to participate in the collection of data. It would be excellent if we could come up with a challenge that leads to further technological innovation.

With the establishment of Seabed 2030, the effort to map the world's ocean floor has gained much momentum. Over the last two years, we have

succeeded in incorporating a significant amount of data into the GEBCO grid. In addition, the number of partners which was 42 at the end of the first year and 106 at the end of the second, continues to grow.

However, as you are aware, mapping one hundred percent of the world's ocean floor is no easy task. We will not be able to reach this goal by simply continuing what we have been doing so far. I hope that this symposium stimulates the development of new initiatives to accelerate the mapping of the ocean floor.

I am currently 80 years old, but I am hopeful to see the completion of the GEBCO grid before I go off to heaven. I therefore ask for your increased cooperation in making the shared dream for humanity come true.

Thank you.