Remarks by Mr. WAKAMIYA Kenji, State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, at the tenth session of the IRENA Assembly

1　Introduction- Vision of “Long-term Strategy under the Paris Agreement”

My name is WAKAMIYA Kenji, State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan. I am honored to speak on behalf of the Japanese government at this important meeting which is the first Assembly for Director-General La Camera and the milestone of the 10th session of the IRENA Assembly.

The Paris Agreement will finally be implemented this year, in 2020. Japan is one of the countries severely affected by climate change, such as the recent devastating damage from storms and floods, and is taking measures against it as an urgent issue. Under the “Long-term Strategy under the Paris Agreement” adopted in June last year, Japan is aiming to realize a “decarbonized society” as early as possible in the second half of this century.

2　Promotion of renewable energy to realize a decarbonized society

There is no doubt that promotion of renewable energy is indispensable for the realization of a decarbonized society. I highly appreciate the leadership taken by IRENA for promoting renewable energy in the international community.

In Japan, the utilization of renewables as “the major power source” has been actively promoted in the 5th Basic Energy Plan, and the proportion of variable renewable energy such as solar and wind power has increased tenfold since 2010, overcoming the difficult energy circumstances after the Great East Japan Earthquake. In order to make good use of such highly variable renewable energy, Japan is working on the usage and introduction of hydrogen, which will be discussed at this Assembly. In addition, Japan is also working on the improvement of storage battery technologies that are high-performance as well as cost-effective. I am especially proud that Dr. Yoshino of Japan won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry last year for his development of the lithium-ion battery.

In Fukushima, a hydrogen production facility is scheduled to begin operations this year. It is equipped with the world’s largest electrolysis equipment that has an output of 10MW, as well as a solar power generator that has an output of 20MW.The hydrogen produced from this system will be used as fuel for fuel-cell vehicles and buses during the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics this year.

3　Raising the issue of disposal of equipment related to renewable energy and international cooperation

As the use of renewable energy sources becomes increasingly prevalent, several researches, including the ones by IRENA, show that a large amount of solar panels, wind turbines, storage batteries, etc. are expected to reach their end-of-life around 2030. Is the international community ready to enter such an era? I highly doubt it. In order to promote the long-term and stable diffusion of renewable energy, considering and tackling the issue of future disposal of such equipment is as important as accelerating the usage of renewable energy if we really care about the environment.

In Japan, under the Long-term Strategy, we will work to ensure that the reuse, recycling and proper disposal and treatment of used solar panels, which will be large quantities in the near future, will be executed. This initiative will contribute to the realization of a Recycling-based Society as well as to the achievement of the SDGs, such as the substantial reduction of waste generation. We should discuss here, in IRENA, how the international community should work together to deal with the issue of future disposal of renewable energy equipment.

Usage of renewable energy is rapidly increasing in developing countries, and it is therefore important to support these countries on how to handle the future disposal of their equipment themselves. Japan has held workshops with IRENA for small island countries and has implemented technical cooperation through the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to support the usage and operation of renewable energy and access to climate finance in developing countries. In the future, we will also make use of the technology and knowledge that Japan has developed over the years to cooperate in promoting reduction, reuse, and recycling of renewable energy equipment in developing countries.

4　Conclusion

Renewable energy can be beneficial not only to the fight against climate change but also to the realization of a Recycling-based Society as well as to the achievement of the SDGs, such as the improvement of energy access. In order to find concrete ways to make renewable energy sustainable and provide a beautiful environment for future generations, from now on, Japan is willing to discuss with IRENA and its member countries future challenges as well.
Thank you for your kind attention.