

UNU 37th Global Seminar Student Report by Coco Kawaguchi

1. Introduction

My name is Coco Kawaguchi and I am a first-year student at Keio University. As an activist involved in Fridays for Future, I took part in the UNU 37th Global Seminar to expand my network and knowledge about the climate crisis. I want to apply that knowledge at the next Global Day of Climate Action on 25 March, and when building my future career.

2. Keynote Speech Summary

Professor Yukiko Hirabayashi

Prof. Hirabayashi talked about the legacy of the 2021 Assessment Report by the IPCC from a scientist's point of view. The 2021 IPCC Report is significant in that it has declared that human influence has undoubtedly caused climate change. Prof. Hirabayashi was responsible for writing Chapter 4 on water. Comparing global surface temperatures under purely natural influence versus both human and natural influence, it became clear that human activities were the main cause of the global temperature rise. Adaptation measures such as carbon neutrality and the shift to renewable energy are crucial to mitigating the consequences of global warming. Preserving natural bodies of water is also important. While some damage is already irreversible, maintaining global warming under the 1.5 degree target would significantly prevent permanent loss of species.

One of the main objectives of the Fridays for Future movement is to listen to and reflect the voices of scientists. The seminar was an opportunity to confirm what scientists have been saying about the urgency of tackling climate change. I also learned new vocabulary such as "mitigation" and "adaptation".

Professor Yee-Kuang Heng

Prof. Heng explained that the World Economic Forum again ranked extreme weather events as the greatest global risk. These extreme weather events include the heat dome in Canada and super typhoons in America. In Japan water shortages in dams are happening more often. Extreme weather events are expected to increase in frequency and size. In other words, younger generations would have to withstand more severe climate change. That is why young people are using civil disobedience to appeal to the decision makers for change. However, civil disobedience alone is not enough to influence political decision making. In addition to protests, more discussions and participation in commission surveys should be conducted. Agreed upon by 23 countries, The Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill is expected to increase the chances for young people to take part in the decision-making process. Educating them about the increased future impacts of climate change and effective civil disobedience is an important task.

This was an eye-opening speech that explained why the current activism was not sufficient. Neither the older nor the younger generation has enough knowledge about climate change. Education is important, but we also need to accelerate actions to limit the global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees. The task of balancing long-term and short-term goals is perhaps the biggest challenge that the world faces.

Professor Daniel Murdiyaso

Prof. Murdiyaso referred to the 2013 Wetland Supplement which is an important report that scientists have been using. In Asia, peatlands are disappearing due to the need to create new spaces for agriculture. Burning peatlands emit carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gasses. It also destroys blue carbon, which is stored in coastal ecosystems such as mangroves and seagrass meadows, which accumulate far more carbon than terrestrial forests. Currently, initiatives are being taken to restore vegetation. Growing native plants and blocking water canals is challenging, but gradually animals have been coming back to the restored lands. Wetlands provide excellent habitats to foster biodiversity. They also serve as a powerful cleaning system of nature. Preserving them should be a priority.

Prof. Murdiyaso mentioned ecotourism, and I have visited Malaysian mangroves to see proboscis monkeys and orangutans. Following the speech, I heard interesting remarks about the relationship between mangroves and crude oil. In Nigeria where there are mangroves, there is also very good quality crude oil. Companies from foreign countries come to dig oil wells that destroy the land, and oil spills are contaminating both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. To Japanese people, wetlands may seem like a very remote topic (global warming and climate change is very often discussed but since many Japanese do not live near wetlands they might find it difficult to relate). This speech was very helpful in raising awareness about the significance of wetlands.

3. Group Discussion Summary

The focus of our group discussion was teaching Japanese secondary students about the SDGs and climate change. Since the education program was intended for Japanese children, we found that concentrating on issues prevalent in developing countries would not be very appealing. We agreed that focusing attention on the most relevant issues and then zooming out to what is happening in other parts of the world would be most effective. Furthermore, since students might find it difficult to read long documents or spend hours listening to lectures, we tried to increase opportunities to take part in activities.

4. Overall Feedback

The 37th Global Seminar was a very valuable experience. I learned a lot from the professors. But what I found most interesting was hearing the experiences and opinions from other participants. I have lived in several countries, but I have only seen photos of what is happening in parts of Africa and in small island nations. Hearing descriptions by people who were directly impacted left a big impression on me. At the same time, I gained confidence in the climate justice movement that I am a part of. Not all people want to put in a lot of time, effort, and money for the environment for

the greater good and not everyone sees climate change as an utmost priority. However, without adaptation, climate change will become more severe and irreversible. I look forward to continuing my work in the environmental field and promoting discussion with decision makers.