Remarks by H.E. Mr. Koichiro Gemba, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan,
at the Opening Session of the Interactive Session of the United Nations High-level Meeting on Nuclear Safety and Security
New York, 22 September 2011

Your Excellency Minister Aloizio Mercadante, Co-Chairman,
Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government and Ministers of State,

1. In beginning my remarks, I should like to extend my welcome to all who are gathering for this session today. I am Koichiro Gemba, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, serving as a co-chair of this interactive session together with His Excellency Mr. Aloizio Mercadante, Minister of Science, Technology, and Innovation of Brazil. As the person responsible for the foreign policy of Japan, and also as a member of the National Diet, born and raised in Fukushima and representing a Fukushima constituency, I express my profound gratitude for the support we have received from the international community and the solidarity shown to us in response to the unprecedentedly large-scaled earthquake and tsunami disaster and the nuclear accident.

2. The earthquake and tsunami disaster and the nuclear accident of the 11th of March changed my outlook on life dramatically. Above all, I became quite literally painfully aware that we absolutely must not treat preparations for severe accidents or terrorist attacks lightly. By taking advantage of opportunities such as this meeting, I very much hope that countries throughout the world will put the lessons we have learned to good use.

3. Japan has been orchestrating its collective efforts to work tirelessly to bring the accident at the nuclear power station under stable control. We will undertake a thorough verification of the accident and ensure nuclear safety at the highest level in the world. We will be implementing "stress
tests” at our other nuclear plants. While we keep utilising nuclear power generation through increasing the degree of safety, from a medium- to long-term perspective, we will reduce dependency on it. Since the accident occurred, our scientists have been diligently collecting facts, breaking them down, and analysing them. Day and night, they are unceasingly searching out means of bringing the accident to a stable situation, raising the level of nuclear safety, and utilizing nuclear energy in ways that hardly raise concerns on radiation. Policy makers must set forth a future direction, taking these matters into consideration.

4. The accident site is roughly 40 kilometres from my hometown. The people there are concerned about the impacts of radiation on human health. Yet at the same time, residents of the disaster-stricken area, including the residents of Fukushima Prefecture, feel intense sadness at the fact that agricultural and fishery products whose safety the government has confirmed are being rejected and that even safe tourist spots are being shunned. Harmful rumours about radiation are hindering reconstruction.

5. As a person engaged in national policy, I believe that it is important to undertake drastic decontamination activities in a rigorous manner, taking full advantage of the scrupulous character of our race and making full use of the advanced technology we possess. Yet, even if we succeed in those endeavours, a vague feeling of unease would likely remain among the public. To address such unease, it is imperative that we should concentrate scientific knowledge to explain the reality to the public on the basis of scientific objectivity in order to free people from anxiety. I believe this will also assist in preventing harmful rumours about radiation.

6. In this light, I have a request I would like to make at the United Nations General Assembly, where representatives
gather from nations around the world and from international organisations. That request is for co-operation in efforts to build understanding grounded in science regarding the impacts of radiation on human health. In order to raise the level of literacy regarding nuclear power amongst the international community, let us strengthen our efforts for the knowledge of the IAEA, the WHO, and each country to be consolidated into a single work and disseminated to the general public in an easy to understand manner.

7. The history of mankind is also the history of taking on the challenge of developing new energy sources. Japan, which possesses meagre fossil fuel resources, must take the initiative at the global level to build a society with a new energy model. I would like to provide to the world the most advanced model of energy conservation and renewable energies, utilizing our advanced technological capabilities on which Japan prides itself, while also combining regulatory reform with policies that will promote the diffusion of these technologies.

8. In closing, rooted in my firm belief that without the recovery of Fukushima, there can be no revitalization of Japan, I will dedicate my full efforts to shouldering my responsibilities and fulfilling my role as the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the country in which the recent accident occurred. I urge you to engage in active discussions in this session that will be of value as we work to reinforce nuclear safety worldwide. With that, I will return the microphone to my co-chair, Minister Mercadante.