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**Description of contents**

- (1) Box no. **3150**
- (2) Folder title/number: **(6)**  
**618.36: Forestry**

(3) Date: **Nov. 1949**

(4) Subject:

Classification	Type of record
<b>614</b>	<b>f</b>

(5) Item description and comment:

(6) Reproduction:  **Yes**       No

(7) Film no. \_\_\_\_\_ Sheet no. \_\_\_\_\_

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618.36

CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

REPORT ON WORLD FORESTRY

Press Conference Given 9 November 1949, at Civil Information & Education Section, GHQ, SCAP

by  
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The Third World Forestry Congress, held in Helsinki, Finland, 7-20 July 1949, was attended by Dr Sadao Ogihara, Professor of Soil Erosion, Tokyo University; Mr Herbert D. Bruce, Head, Products and Research Branch, Forestry Division, Natural Resources Section, and myself. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss and exchange information on forest resources, technical advancements, and research that had been accomplished since the last Congress, held in Budapest in 1936. More than 500 technical foresters from 41 countries attended.

The world is experiencing an acute shortage of wood as a result of increased demands during World War II and of requirements for reconstruction in the postwar period. Industrial regions and countries are making heavy use of processed wood, both as lumber and as pulp. The shortage is even more difficult to meet because substantial forest areas are unproductive except for fuel. The dominant fact about the forests of the earth as a source of commodities is that forests are distributed unevenly in relation to countries, population, and areas. Most of the wood which is used industrially is softwood; the distribution of the softwood forests is more uneven than that of forests as a whole. Furthermore, it should be noted that in most forest and geographic regions traditional destructive practices still persist on a large scale. These destructive practices destroyed forests and wrecked agriculture in many Mediterranean countries and in China and India.

Essential factors in the world forestry and forestry products situation include:

- (1) Industrial operations require use of large quantities of softwoods.
- (2) The major sources of supply for softwoods are Canada, United States, USSR, and Northern Europe. Canada is the only net exporter and is concerned about the excessive exploitation of its softwood stands.
- (3) Indigenous softwood supplied in most other areas do not meet requirements.
- (4) The existing short supply, particularly of softwoods, emphasizes the need for the installation of sound forestry practices everywhere.

The most important fact about the world's forest situation is that there is enough fertile forest land to produce continuously much more wood than at present. But this goal can be reached only if the nations replace destructive exploitation with good forest management.

The Forestry Congress in Finland was of particular significance to Japan, a nation greatly dependent upon wood products. Finland and Japan have a common interest in that they are the two most highly forested countries in the temperate zone. However, Japan's timber position is bad and is rapidly deteriorating. Wood imports formerly assisted Japan in meeting requirements and limited overcutting. Currently, forest exploitation is two and one-half times growth. Accessible forest timber is rapidly disappearing. As a result of over-exploitation and improper forest management, flood and siltation are impoverishing agricultural lands and damaging transportation, communications, and hydroelectric facilities at an increasing rate. If the present rate of exploitation continues for the next two decades, the wood products industry, the second most valuable industry in Japan, will be forced to close down because of lack of indigenous timber. Throughout the post-hostilities period attention has been concentrated on emergency programs for reconstruction and reestablishment of the Japanese economy. Success has been attained, in part, by drawing upon the forests to an almost exhaustive degree.

Although the Japanese forest situation is serious, corrective action can be taken before conditions become desperate. Japan must provide immediately for supervision and improvement of timber cutting practices to increase growth and maintain a protective forest cover on its watersheds. The end use of wood must be controlled so that nonessential consumption is eliminated; needs must be evaluated carefully. Research should be directed toward the most efficient utilization of wood. Substitutes for wood fuels and softwood timbers can be developed. Lignite reserves and broadleaved species are not fully or efficiently exploited. It is time that the Japanese people put into effect long-range programs that will restore and again make productive the forest areas.