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## Muji operator donates \$200,000 for eco-site in Ecuador

Kyodo News

Retailer Ryohin Keikaku Co., which operates Muji-brand shops in 21 countries and regions, has signed a deal to provide \$200,000 to an international initiative protecting an ecological site in an oil-rich area of Ecuador's Amazon rainforest.

Masaaki Kanai, president of the company, and Ecuadorian Ambassador to Japan Leonardo Carrion exchanged documents in a ceremony at Ecuador's Embassy in Japan on Tuesday to mark the retailer's financial contribution toward leaving an estimated 850 million barrels of crude oil untouched under Ecuador's Yasuni National Park.

The money will go to a trust fund launched in August last year by the Ecuadorian government and the U.N. Development Program. The money will be spent promoting renewable energy sources, antideforestation activities and conservation of the park's biodiversity, as it is home to indigenous people and is one of the world's most diverse biological reserves.

"As a company, we have long pursued a better relationship between nature, human beings and merchandise. Now that the world's population tops 7 billion, we should

rethink the trend of promoting individualism and try to regain a sustainable social order," said Kanai in an address at the ceremony, explaining why his company decided to contribute to the fund.

Kanai expressed hope that other Japanese businesses and individuals will follow the company's move to support the Ecuadorian initiative and said that Ryohin Keikaku will collect donations for the conservation project through its website.

The envoy welcomed contributions by the Muji-shop operator, saying they are "encouraging" because the initiative has been slow to attract contributions from the international community.

The fund's objective is to collect at least half of the estimated \$7 billion that oil development would bring. By forgoing oil exploration, it is estimated that more than 400 million metric tons of carbon will be prevented from being discharged into the atmosphere, thus contributing to the fight against climate change.

European countries such as Germany and Spain, as well as Latin American countries including Chile and Mexico, are among the contributors to the fund. The Japanese government has not joined the initiative.

About \$116 million has so far been donated to the fund, according to Ecuadorian media reports.