

**Opening Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Open Forum,
World Assembly for Women in Tokyo: WAW! 2015**

Friday, August 28, 2015

[Provisional Translation]

Welcoming remarks

Welcome to WAW! And welcome to Japan.

This year's WAW! is the second time for the World Assembly for Women to meet, with approximately 150 people coming together from about 40 countries and eight international organizations, surpassing last year's figures.

Abenomics is "womenomics." Over the last two and a half years, I have consistently promoted the dynamic engagement of women. Over this time, some one million women have newly entered the labor market, while the number of female corporate board members has also increased by roughly 30 per cent. My wishes do not stop at Japan's borders. As I stated at the UN General Assembly last year, Japan intends to make the 21st century a century with no human rights violations against women. It is a great honor for me to have been chosen by UN Women as one of the ten male heads of state and government to promote the dynamic engagement of women through top-down means.

Japan's men are also starting to change. Since last year, male corporate managers including Mr. Yoshimitsu Kobayashi, Chairman of Mitsubishi Chemical Holdings Corporation, and Mr. Hidetoshi Sakuma, President of The Chiba Bank, both of whom are participating in this year's WAW!, have declared they will take actions that enable women to demonstrate to the greatest possible extent the potential they hold, and they have been engaged in ongoing efforts to expand the circle of acceptance.

Having men participate as well

This year, WAW! has taken "WAW! for All" as its theme. This is a message of women and men alike cooperating to create a society in which it is easy for both women and men to live.

The greatest challenge facing Japan is our declining population, brought about by our aging society and falling birthrate. In the past, there was a widely-seen tendency for a higher rate of female labor force participation to cause a lower birth rate. And yet, in the present day, the developed nations leading the world in the active engagement of women have both a high women's labor force participation ratio and a high birth rate

simultaneously. In particular, the countries of Northern Europe have been superbly successful at reconciling economic growth and rising birth rates under the banner of active participation by women.

Japan also wants to emulate this, but our greatest barrier is a working culture that endorses male-centered long working hours. If men themselves do not awaken to this fact and take action, we will not be able to eliminate this bad practice. First of all, we will expand a corporate culture that values working efficiently within a limited number of hours. Husbands will also actively take childcare leave and couples will share responsibility for household chores and child rearing. We will make this the ordinary practice in Japan.

When this happens, both men and women will be able to make highly productive jobs compatible with their bountiful daily lives naturally while they are able to lead more fulfilled lives as individuals, as well as within their families and communities. The dynamic engagement of women will also enrich men's lives.

In order to realize this kind of society, companies must also provide a work environment in which it is easy for employees to take childcare leave. Within government procurement, we will more proactively value and support companies working to provide a sound work-life balance.

Women as leaders in their organizations

True reform will not come about unless we have more women becoming leaders in their organizations, in addition to changes in men's consciousness.

We must first undertake the actions we call on others to take. We decided on a policy under which, starting this fiscal year, the percentage of women among newly-hired national public servants will exceed 30 per cent in the government as a whole, and we attained that target in the managerial candidate career track by increasing the percentage of women hired by 10.4 percentage points all at once compared with last fiscal year, to 34.3 per cent. As for women in civil servant managerial posts that correspond to corporate board member positions, we approximately doubled the number during roughly the first year and a half after I assumed office.

As for private-sector companies, we now require within securities reports a reporting of the ratio of female board members. This morning, a new bill was enacted to promote the active engagement of women in society. From April 2016, companies will be required to draw up and announce voluntary action plans incorporating numerical targets for promoting the hiring of women and the appointment of women to executive positions. The national government and local authorities will also draw up action plans. This is the first step toward putting women into positions that have

decision-making authority. Japan has moved forward onto a new stage. Keidanren (the Japan Business Federation) already began announcing action plans publicly last summer, and the number of participating companies has expanded to roughly tenfold over this past year. We will provide solid institutional support for such trends.

As we promote the appointment of women to positions having decision-making authority, it is necessary to have an environment in which women also devote themselves to hard study, mindful that such possibilities for appointment exist, and an environment in which the people around them expect such appointments. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who joins us today, is Africa's first female president. Ms. Marillyn Hewson is a career employee of defense industry company Lockheed Martin Corporation, an industry with a male-dominated image. She broke through the glass ceiling and climbed all the way to the very top. I very much look forward to hearing her talk later in the program about what is important in order to have women assume positions with decision-making authority.

The frontier of women's dynamic engagement

I have also been observing an expansion of the fields in which women are dynamically engaged. Diversity in human resources gives rise to innovation. In Japan too, a large number of companies have begun to notice this fact. Women and diverse human resources send out new goods and services to the market by making best use of their own particular strengths and knowledge.

Ms. Tomoko Fukuyama, who is responsible for business operations at a scale of tens of billions of yen as an executive officer for a leading Japanese snacks manufacturer yet heads home at 4 PM every day to take care of her children; Ms. Yuu Yamakami, who is deeply committed to popularizing and expanding the use of recycling waterless toilets in Kenya. Ms. Sachiko Kuno, a researcher who has, uncommonly, succeeded in the consecutive development of new pharmaceuticals, and who is now an incubator seeking to discover exceptional talent. The number of women bringing forth new value in society is growing rapidly.

Japan is a science and technology-oriented country. Surely, women can be more actively engaged in the fields of science and technology. However, we hear companies say that even when they want to hire women, the number of female university students majoring in the sciences is quite low to start with.

This summer, over 30 companies have been conducting a program that allows female junior and senior high school students to experience jobs in the sciences at construction sites and factories. In addition, the national government will launch a

network in which relevant people in industry, academia, and government cooperate. Through this, we will enable female university students to gain an interest in scientific and technological fields and draw up fulfilling career plans from their junior and senior high school days.

We will also support women in starting businesses. When women launch businesses they cultivate new demand and bring vitality to local areas. The percentage of businesses founded by women remains lower than 20 per cent and the number has been decreasing continuously for more than a decade. I will bring about a rebound in that figure. In order to do so, we will run courses to cultivate female entrepreneurs and other coursework useful in founding businesses in areas all around Japan and support in each local area networks in which experienced business founders, core businesses in each local area, and financial institutions cooperate to support the establishment of businesses by women.

Support for disadvantaged households

In addition, we must not forget to walk alongside people who find themselves in various circumstances. We will draw up by roughly the end of this year a policy package that will further enhance assistance for female-headed households regarding child rearing, daily life, employment and other aspects. This package will at the same time prepare a structure through which support will connect reliably with households that require it.

International efforts

A society in which it is easy for all people, both women and men, to live. I will spare no effort to create that kind of society in Japan and also in the world.

Two years ago at the UN General Assembly, I pledged that the Government of Japan would implement ODA in excess of US\$3 billion over the following three years, until 2015, to bring about “a society in which women shine,” and we have been executing that steadily. In February, we reviewed the principles underpinning Japan’s ODA for the first time in 12 years and added the promotion of women’s participation to one of the principles. Over the next three years, we will implement ODA of more than 42 billion yen toward high-quality education for women and girls so that they will be economically independent and able to determine the course of their own lives through their own volition.

We will also do our very utmost in extending cooperation to UN Women, Ms. Zainab Bangura’s Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and other international organizations. In fact, over the past two years, Japan increased its contributions to UN Women tenfold on a yen basis. The

kick-off ceremony for the UN Women Japan Liaison Office in Tokyo will take place the day after tomorrow, and I myself intend to participate and offer my congratulations.

Conclusion

Next year, Japan will assume the G7 presidency, and I intend to push the agenda on women forward vigorously at the Ise-Shima Summit as well. I plan to link the outcome of this year's WAW! in to the Ise-Shima Summit. The connections between women and entrepreneurship, the natural sciences and technology, education and other kinds of empowerment, and health are all examples of themes that I would like to place emphasis on in the context of the G7 in particular.

The final curtain has been drawn on the era in which people ask why we promote the dynamic engagement of women in society. Now is the time for us to discuss how to bring it into reality. I hope that today and tomorrow you deepen your discussions, leading to the realization of a society in which women shine.