Statement by Mr. Shinzo Abe
Prime Minister of Japan

The Path towards Universal Health Coverage
−Promotion of equitable global health and human security in the post-2015 development era−

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to begin by thanking you for coming to today's side-event, "The Path towards Universal Health Coverage" co-hosted by the Global Fund and Japan.

I place great importance on Japan's further contribution to world peace and prosperity under the banner of "Proactive Contribution to Peace" based on the principles of international cooperation. Standing on the concept of "human security," which centralizes each individual, Japan is ready to contribute to addressing global challenges including health, through its experience, expertise, high quality medical technologies, research and development ability, and health professionals.

Japan has long played a major role in addressing global health issues. During the G8 Kyushu-Okinawa Summit in 2000, Japan took up the issue of infectious diseases on the agenda for the first time in the history of the G8 Summit, which led to the establishment of the Global Fund, which is a co-host of today's event. As you are aware, the Global Fund has made enormous contributions to the fights against HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. A plan is currently under consideration to make Okinawa, the host city of the G8 summit in 2000, a global medical hub. During the G8 Hokkaido-Toyako Summit in 2008, we led the participating nations to agree on the importance of strengthening health systems.

In 2016, Japan will host the G7 Ise Shima Summit and the G7 Kobe Health Ministers' Meeting. As the host country of these two meetings, Japan will continue to make contributions in global health. In the same year, the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) will be held for the first time in Africa and health will be one of the important areas of discussion at the conference.

As I see it, there are two key areas in the current global health landscape. First, global health governance needs to be strengthened in order to be able to effectively respond to public health emergencies. For example, there are many important lessons to be learned from the recent outbreak of the Ebola virus disease. Second, Universal Health Coverage (UHC) needs to be achieved in order to ensure that all people can receive the health services they need at an affordable cost. This target has been included in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Furthermore, these two key areas are inter-linked.

In order to address these two areas, Japan has just launched its new global health policy, the "Basic Design for Peace and Health".

With regard to global health governance and the capacity to respond to public health emergencies such as the Ebola virus outbreak, the slow initial response has been pointed out as symptomatic a serious problem and it demonstrated that we need to further strengthen global health governance in order to better prepare for potential pandemics. In this regard, I have great expectations for the upcoming report of the High-Level Panel under UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. Japan is eager to contribute to the international discussion to envision a more ideal design for global health governance. In particular, we feel there need to be clear guidelines for the respective roles of donor countries, the international organizations, and the private sector in times of public health emergencies, as well as for the quick and sure deployment of financial and human resources to affected areas.

Secondly, in the times between such crises, we need to work on building good systems that can respond to diverse health problems. In addition to long-standing health concerns such as maternal and child health and malnutrition, new issues such as life-style related diseases and ageing are emerging as challenges around the world including in developing countries. To manage such diverse health challenges, we need to strengthen health systems with a view to achieving Universal Health Coverage.

The key to these two propositions, addressing public health emergencies and achieving UHC, is health system strengthening. In order to develop a resilient health system in country, it is important to take into account income levels, existing health systems, disease burden, and many other factors in that country and to provide tailor made support to each country. Furthermore, these health systems need to be sustainable and comprehensive. Realizing this goal requires committed financial and human resources including those mobilized from within the recipient country itself.

Therefore, I emphasize here the need to bring together expertise and resources from donor countries, the international organizations including WHO, the Global Fund and World Bank, and the private sector to establish an international alliance to support developing countries to achieve stronger health systems. I hope that today's event will become an important step forward on the road to promote the formation of such an alliance to strengthen health systems towards the ultimate goal of achieving UHC. Japan is ready to lead this global discussion.

Thank you for your kind attention.