

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
Statement by the Head of the Delegation of Japan
for the Seventh and Eighth Periodic Reports

16 February 2016

Distinguished members of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Today the seventh and eighth periodic reports made by the Japanese government will be reviewed by your committee. On behalf of the delegation of Japan, I would like to pay our respect to the committee for your tireless efforts to eliminate discrimination against women across the globe.

The Government of Japan is proud that Ms. Yoko Hayashi is playing an active role as Chairperson of the CEDAW Committee and greatly contributes to its activities. The Government of Japan will continue to cooperate with the Committee in order to eliminate discrimination against women and also to realize gender equality.

For 30 years since the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1985, Japan has deemed the Convention as one of the mainstays to implement measures for elimination of discrimination against women and gender equality in a range of fields, including those for employment, education and eradication of violence against women. Recently, Prime Minister Abe also declared his intention to create a “society in which women shine” at a session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, and accordingly the Japanese government has been domestically and internationally pressing forward with initiatives to foster gender quality and empowerment of women.

Let me take this opportunity to explain some of the specific measures implemented by the Japanese government with regard to the Convention.

[Basic Act for Gender Equal Society]

First of all, I will brief you on the basis for the Japanese government’s measures for gender equality, namely on the Basic Act for Gender Equal Society, which was enacted in 1999.

The Act defines gender equality as “both men and women, as equal members of society, are given opportunities to freely participate in activities in any fields of society and thereby equally enjoy political, economic, social and cultural benefits as well as share responsibilities”.

Also the Act lays out the basic principles and clarifies the responsibilities of the national and local governments and citizens in regard to the formation of a gender equal society. One of the basic principles enshrined in the Act is to respect the dignity of men and women as individuals, while ensuring that they do not receive any discriminatory treatment based on gender and can secure opportunities to exercise their abilities as individuals. Here “discriminatory treatment” means treatment that is regarded as discriminatory by those who have received such treatment, regardless of whether it is intended to be discriminatory or not.

Furthermore, the Act provides for another basic principle as follows: “In consideration that social systems or practices can be factors that impede the Formation of a Gender Equal Society by reflecting a stereotyped division of roles on the basis of gender, and having a biased effect on men and women’s selection of social activities, consideration shall be given so that social systems and practices have as neutral an impact as possible on this selection of social activities.”

Moreover the Act states that the national government is responsible for the comprehensive formulation and implementation of policies on promotion of the Formation of a Gender Equal Society, clearly including positive action.

Pursuant to this Act, Japan will continue to carry out its obligations to respect, protect and fulfill women’s right to be free from discrimination and right to enjoy equality.

[Fourth Basic Plan]

Now let me report to you about the Japanese government’s latest initiative: the Fourth Basic Plan for Gender Equality, which was newly formulated at the end of last year.

The Basic Plan for Gender Equality sets the basic direction of governmental policies and specific measures to be adopted to foster gender equality-related measures in a comprehensive and planned manner based on the Basic Act for a Gender Equal Society,

and the Cabinet decided on the Fourth Basic Plan in December 2015.

This plan was formulated by attributing importance to dialogue with civil society. Specifically, it widely incorporates a total of 3,616 public comments, and the results of the local public hearings held at six venues across the country with the participation of some 881 people, in addition to the results of discussions held proactively by experts from various fields.

[Outline of the Plan]

The Basic Plan focuses on the following items: the first, to reform labor practices that are based on male-oriented working styles, including the tendency to take long working hours and transfers for granted, since for women to contribute actively to the workplace and enjoy fulfilling working lives, it is key to ensure that they can choose from a variety of flexible working styles; the second, to foster measures to increase the recruitment and promotion of women and develop female human resources who will be in managerial positions in the future with an eye to expanding women's participation in all fields of society; the third, to establish an environment in which women can live with peace of mind by giving careful consideration and support to women faced with difficult situations; and the fourth, to enhance measures to eliminate violence against women.

The 4th Basic Plan incorporates 71 performance indices for the purpose of its effective implementation and the Council for Gender Equality, which is chaired by the Chief Cabinet Secretary and composed of relevant ministers and experts, will conduct follow-up activities in an effective manner.

[Expansion of Women's Social Participation]

The Abe Cabinet has been regarding the empowerment of women as a high priority issue since the launch of the Cabinet in December 2012, and is implementing a range of measures including positive action. Among the performance indices set in the Basic Plan, the numerical targets for the expansion of women's social participation is given priority, and the Fourth Basic Plan itself functions as positive action that has a specific goal and timetable, as did the Third Basic Plan. As a result of measures that have been recently taken in this way, the percentage of women who are in managerial positions in the national and local governments and also at companies in the private sector has been increasing with a rise in the employment rate of women. Empowerment of women is

thus being fostered across the whole of Japanese society.

In order to accelerate this social move, the Fourth Basic Plan sets out highly ambitious targets that would be possible to achieve if all-out efforts are made in each field of society for the expansion of women's social participation across those fields. The plan also includes a target regarding the pool of human resources who will assume managerial positions in the future. These targets are set based on the idea that it is critical for the next five years to focus on the provision of more opportunities to receive training opportunities and work experience to increase talented female human resources steadily as a precondition to foster the promotion of women.

[Reform of Labor Practices]

The Basic Plan also focuses on the reform of labor practices that tend to take long working hours and relocations for granted.

As an incentive to urge companies to implement necessary measures, examinations are now being made for the introduction of a system to broadly give higher evaluations to companies that foster a better work-life balance for their employees among bidders for public procurement contracts.

Also a child care leave benefits system that ensures 80% of net income to both fathers and mothers during the leave period up to six months will encourage men to engage more in childcare and household work. Furthermore, over five years from 2013, childcare facilities will be increased to accept a further 500,000 children and reduce those who are waiting for vacancies at such facilities to zero. Moreover, a bill that incorporates the following three items was submitted to the present session of the Diet: firstly, measures to allow employees to divide up their care leave to best suit their circumstances and exempt them from overtime work so that they will not have to quit their jobs due to obligations as a caregiver; secondly, measures to encourage employers to implement more initiatives to prevent so-called "maternity harassment" and promote a working environment that is more supportive of pregnancy, childbirth and childcare leave; and thirdly, a system to allow also fixed-term contract workers to take childcare leave more easily. In addition, to encourage self-employed women to become pregnant and give birth to children with a sense of mind, Japan's national pension system will be reviewed to exempt Category I insured persons from the payment of insurance premiums for a certain period before, during and after childbirth. Through

these measures, the Japanese government will provide people with a better labor environment in which anyone can work while taking care of their children and other family members with peace of mind.

[Act of Promotion of Women’s Participation and Advancement in the Workplace]

Madam Chair, with regard to positive action, Japan made great progress last year. Specifically, in order to foster the empowerment of women in workplaces, the Act of Promotion of Women’s Participation and Advancement in the Workplace was enacted last August and will be fully enforced this April.

It is needless to say that gender discrimination in employment has already been prohibited, and companies have been voluntarily implementing measures for positive action. The new law, however, mandates the national and local governments and also large companies to identify and analyze their situations, formulate action plans with numerical targets, and publicly disclose information regarding the recruitment and promotion of women. The law thus provides an unprecedentedly progressive system for positive action. Each company assesses and analyses the actual situations for men and women separately, such as the average years of service and percentage of managers, and implements appropriate measures to help increase the numbers of female managers and lead to the elimination of disparity of pay between men and women.

To enforce this Act in an effective manner, briefing sessions on the Act have been held across the country together with the distribution of leaflets on the law. Furthermore, a website will be opened to share information on actual situations regarding the empowerment of women in companies and have them evaluated by various people in relevant fields.

It can be said that Japan has entered a new stage regarding positive action for gender equality. We will continue to make every effort to work steadily on the aforementioned measures to create a society in which all women who want to fully display their personalities and abilities at work can in fact do so.

[Intensive Policy]

Madam Chair, in order to foster the empowerment of women, it is effective to incorporate the perspective of gender equality in the budgeting process.

To this end, the first Intensive Policy to Accelerate the Empowerment of Women was formulated last year. Based on the Intensive Policy, the government sets the priority measures to be taken by June every year that is incorporated in the budget requests to be made by the governmental agencies at the end of August. Through the budgeting based on the Intensive Policy, the government's measures to foster the empowerment of women will be expanded and accelerated in terms of both human and financial resources. The Intensive Policy 2015 includes a range of measures to provide the basis for the empowerment of women, such as measures aimed at: expanding women's participation in the process of deciding policies and principles in each area of society, eliminating all forms of harassment against women, providing support to single mothers and other women placed in difficult situations, and eliminating all kinds of violence against women.

[Progress in the international arena]

In addition to these internal measures, the Government of Japan has been undertaking various efforts to contribute to international society in order to create a world with no human rights violations against women. In this regard, Japan's recent contribution to UN Women was 75 times bigger in Japanese Yen base compared to that of five years ago.

At the UN 68th Session of the General Assembly, the Government of Japan expressed the intention to implement ODA in excess of US \$3 billion for the three year period from 2013 to 2015 in order to realize "a society where women shine," and has been steadily implementing it. In February 2015, the Government approved the Development Cooperation Charter, a policy document including the most fundamental rules and principles of ODA, which has the promotion of women's participation as one of its principles.

As the host country of the G7 this year, Japan intends to put forward the topic of gender mainstreaming and will focus on women's empowerment, especially from the point of view of education at the G7 Ise-Shima Summit in May this year. Moreover, more than 20 years ago, the Government launched the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) to discuss the development of Africa and the 6th TICAD will be held in Africa for the first time this year. TICAD VI will support Africa's Agenda 2063 as well as social development, such as the rebuilding of health systems and the comprehensive education and empowerment of women.

Since 2014, the Government of Japan has held the World Assembly for Women (WAW!) annually with an aim of realizing a society where women shine in Japan and the world. Last year, 145 leaders in various fields from 42 countries and 8 international organizations gathered. Under two main themes "Women and Economy" and "Global Issues", participants discussed various issues related to women in a comprehensive manner and made several proposals. The proposals and ideas generated were sent out as a UN document named "WAW! To Do 2015".

Last September Japan compiled its national action plan to implement UNSC resolution 1325, the first resolution to connect women with peace and security. Japan has long been working proactively in the field of protecting women during armed conflicts and promoting their participation in conflict prevention and post-conflict reconciliation/reconstruction. Now, through setting out and implementing its national action plan, Japan will play a leading role in the international community to create a world free of human rights abuses against women and to achieve 'A Society where Women Shine'.

[Selection of Prime Minister Abe in the IMPACT 10x10x10 initiative]

Madam Chair, for the successful implementation of these gender equality measures, men's commitments are critical.

In the HeForShe IMPACT 10x10x10 initiative implemented by UN Women, Prime Minister Abe was selected to be one of the 10 male leaders to support women's empowerment in a top-down manner. The prime minister has indeed been leading the efforts for women's empowerment in Japan, including appointing a man to be the minister in charge of this issue. In June 2014, a group of men who were executives of Japan's leading companies made a declaration to support the acceleration of women's empowerment to create a "society in which women shine." The Japanese government has also been implementing measures to increase the number of IKUMEN, which means "men proactively raising children", and of IKUBOSS, which refers to "bosses who support their subordinates in both their business and personal lives by giving due consideration to their work-life balance, while at the same time achieving results for their companies. The government will thereby create a society in which all members, including both men and women, can lead their lives comfortably.

[Comfort women issue]

Regarding the comfort women issue, a long-standing issue of concern between Japan and the Republic of Korea, the Foreign Ministers of both countries met on December 28 and confirmed that the issue is resolved finally and irreversibly. Each government is currently making efforts to faithfully implement the content of the agreement.

We will engrave in our hearts the past, when the dignity and honour of many women were severely injured during wars in the 20th century. Japan will lead the world in making the 21st century an era in which women's human rights are not infringed upon.

Let me add a few words on this issue. Since this Convention does not apply retrospectively to any issues that occurred prior to Japan's conclusion thereof (1985), the Government of Japan considers that it is not appropriate for the report to take up the comfort women issue in terms of the implementation of State Party's duties regarding the Convention.

Distinguished members of the Committee,

[Celebration of the 30th Anniversary of the Ratification of the Convention]

Japan celebrated the 30th anniversary of the ratification of the Convention last year, as already mentioned. The Cabinet Office held a commemorative symposium with Ms. Nahla Haidar and Chairperson Yoko Hayashi in attendance, which helped a lot of citizens deepen their understanding of the Convention.

The Japanese government will continue to strive for gender equality and women's empowerment. Today, in receiving this important review on the Japanese government's reports regarding the Convention from your Committee, the delegation of Japan, including myself, will sincerely answer any questions you may have. I hope that we will be able to have a meaningful dialogue with you today.

Thank you very much.