

[As Delivered]

**Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 44 of the Convention
Combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Japan
Opening statement by H.E. Masato OHTAKA,
Ambassador in Charge of UN Affairs,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan**

16 January, 2019

Thank you, Madame Chairperson, Distinguished Members of the Committee, and Ladies and Gentlemen,

On the occasion of the consideration of the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports submitted by Japan, on behalf of the Japanese delegation, I would like to express our sincere appreciation for the tireless efforts by the Committee to promote respect for and ensure the rights of the child.

Today, I am overwhelmed by the fact that the public seats are fully booked. In a way it is an honor, an indication that the great deal of attention on our policies and measures is taken for the rights of children. I can assure you that we should be able to respond to such high attention with our strong delegation. We have a delegation of 18 or so, who will be able to answer the questions that are posed today with authorities.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the landmark Convention on the Rights of the Child at the UN General Assembly. 2019 also marks the 25th anniversary of Japan's ratification of the Convention. As such, we are honored to have the opportunity for a constructive dialogue with the distinguished members of the Committee at this very important juncture.

Looking around the world, children living in conflict zones have been the target of attacks and continue to suffer from brutal violence. I believe that our meeting today follows immediately after the meeting with another State party of the Convention, Syria. I would imagine that there have been a lot of discussions on such matters as well. In any case, millions of children are forced to leave their places of origin in fear of their lives. These children face an uncertain future due to the protracted crises they are caught up in. As children are confronted with increasingly difficult situations, the significance of the Convention continues to grow accordingly even three decades on from its adoption. The Government of Japan reaffirms its commitment to further support children facing difficulties across the globe.

Now looking into our country, the context might be a little different from that of conflict areas, but we have our share of seeing a dynamic demographic transition over the past 70 plus years after WWII. In terms of trends related to children, we have seen a shift from the baby boom period to a period of decreasing birthrate and aging population. In the time of post-war reconstruction and economic growth, education and maternal health service were the basic demands. But in the present day, we are facing diverse and complex challenges, such as bullying, child abuse, sexual exploitation, poverty among children, international child abduction, to name just a few. The rapidly aging society and decreasing birthrate is a particularly urgent issue for Japan and should be called a “national crisis”. In order to overcome such challenges, the Government of Japan is spearheading our efforts by establishing a robust social system where all generations, including children, can enjoy peace of mind.

Almost nine years have passed since the last consideration of our third periodic report by the Committee in May 2010. The Government of Japan has given sincere consideration to the recommendations received at the time and has steadily taken steps to promote and protect children’s rights. At the same time, as I just mentioned, the reality is that various issues have since become increasingly prevalent both domestically and internationally. During the dialogue today and tomorrow, we look forward to receiving constructive comments and advice on our efforts from the Committee members, which will be of valuable reference to us.

It should also be noted that many people from civil society are present today as I mentioned earlier. The Government of Japan recognizes the value of various activities by civil society and places importance on listening to and reflecting a wide range of opinions in implementing the Convention. From this perspective, the Government of Japan held a meeting in February 2016 to exchange views with stakeholders including its citizens and NGOs. In addition, several discussions were held amongst the ministries and agencies concerned and civil society on specific fields. The Government of Japan will continue to emphasize dialogue and cooperation with civil society.

I should also mention that the Japanese people have a special attachment to UNICEF, which provided kind support to children in Japan during the hard times of the post-war period. The Government itself is also closely working together with UNICEF, providing humanitarian and development assistance to children in need around the world as well as protecting children’s rights. Moreover, the fact that the amount of contributions from Japanese nationals to UNICEF has ranked high for many years shows their strong will to support children around

the world as well.

Madame Chairperson, Distinguished Members of the Committee,

Now, please allow me to take this opportunity to walk you through some of Japan's efforts over the past nine years, which are also highlighted in our periodic reports. I will mention nine areas where we have made significant progress.

The first area: child care and education. In order to resolve the issue of Japan's aging society and decreasing birthrate, the Abe administration is making a bold investment in the children and families with small children who will play a vital role in Japan's future. First, the Government has been making dedicated efforts to eliminate the long wait for admission to childcare facilities. Secondly, we are determined to make early childhood education free of charge by October 2019. Third, by April 2020, we will introduce free tuition for higher education for those who truly need such assistance. The Government of Japan is committed to advancing efforts over the coming three years to reform the social security system into one that is oriented to all generations.

Now, the second area: national plan of action. The Government of Japan formulated the "Vision for Children and Young People" in July 2010 and then the "Outline for the Promotion of Development and Support for Children and Young People" in February 2016 as the vision for the promotion of support measures for the development of children and young people, based on the recommendations received during the last consideration and the principles of the Convention. Based on the new outline, the Government of Japan plans to promote measures for creating a society in which all children and young people, including those who face difficulties in leading trouble-free lives in society, can soundly grow to lead independent lives and play important roles.

The third area: tackling poverty. For the purpose of tackling poverty among children in a comprehensive manner, the Act on Promotion of Policy on Poverty among Children was enacted in June 2013, and the Cabinet approved the "General Principles of Policy on Poverty among Children" in August 2014 as well. Based on the General Principles, the Government of Japan is taking initiatives in many fields to realize a society where all children can pursue their dreams regardless of their families' financial circumstances, through measures such as expanding child rearing allowances and scholarships.

The fourth area: prevention of bullying. In order to promote measures to prevent, address and identify the issue of bullying at the earliest stages in a comprehensive and effective way, the Act for the Promotion of Measures to Prevent Bullying was established in

June 2013. In October of the same year, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) established the Basic Policy for Bullying Prevention. Furthermore, the Government of Japan is engaged in various measures including establishing a guideline for surveys about cases such as suicide due to bullying and non-attendance at school, as well as enhancing moral education, and assigning more school counselors and school social workers.

The fifth area: child welfare. The Government of Japan amended the Child Welfare Act and the Act on the Prevention, etc. of Child Abuse in June 2016. These acts clarified that all children should have the right to be guaranteed appropriate upbringing, healthy growth, and development, achieving self-support under appropriate child care in accordance with the spirit of the Convention. These acts also clarified that national and local governments should take appropriate measures to uphold this right, bearing in mind that measures on maternal health such as medical check-ups for infants and children would contribute to preventing and discovering child abuse at the earliest stages.

Now, the sixth area: prevention of child abuse. To prevent the recurrence of tragic incidents of abuse, the Government of Japan is doing its utmost to create a society wherein children's lives are protected by thoroughly implementing "the Urgent Comprehensive Plan to Strengthen Prevention of Child Abuse", which was decided in July 2018 at the meeting of relevant cabinet ministers.

The seventh area: tackling sexual exploitation. Based on the "Basic Plan on Measures against Child Sexual Exploitation", formulated at the Ministerial Meeting Concerning Measures against Crime in April 2017, the Government of Japan is taking further steps, such as enhancement of public awareness regarding the eradication of child sexual exploitation, the strengthening of collaboration with international society, and support for children and families to ensure the sound growth of children without victimization by sexual exploitation.

Next is the eighth area: amendment of the Civil Code and the Penal Code. We have made historic revisions to our core legislation in Japan, which are the Civil Code and the Penal Code. First, in June 2018, the Government of Japan amended the Civil Code to change the legal marriage age to 18 for both men and women, from the previously prescribed ages of 18 for men and 16 for women. Secondly, according to the revision of the Civil Code in December 2013, the share of inheritance of a child out of wedlock was made the same as that of a child in wedlock by deleting the clause that provides "the share in inheritance of a child born out of wedlock shall be one half of the share in inheritance of a child born in wedlock".

Third, the revision of the Penal Code in June 2017 reviewed the elements related to rape and the stipulation that victims of rape be limited to women and girls was changed. Through this revision, victims, including children, would no longer be required to file a criminal complaint in order for the offender to be prosecuted.

Now, the ninth area: international treaties. Since the consideration of our third periodic report, Japan has concluded several international treaties in light of protecting the interests of children. In 2014, Japan concluded the Hague Convention (the Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction). Also, in 2017, Japan concluded the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

These are the steps we have taken since the last set of recommendations provided by the Committee, which we have closely and duly taken into account.

Madame Chairperson, Distinguished Members of the Committee,

Japan intends to lead the promotion of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which aim to leave no one behind. Japan is willing to take initiatives to demonstrate how to realize a prosperous and vibrant future in tandem with globalization and the aging population. To this end, Japan places “empowerment of the next generations and women” as one of its main policy pillars. As the head of the initiatives, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe stated at a meeting of our SDGs Promotion Headquarters in December 2018 that, “we will boldly invest in children, who bear the future, and women, in order to create a Japan that our children and grandchildren will be proud of”. Also, in terms of education and health, Japan intends to achieve quality education for all from preschool through to higher education. Taking the opportunities of hosting the G20 and Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) this year, Japan aims to communicate its experience with other countries while promoting international cooperation on education and Universal Health Coverage (UHC).

Regarding the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children (GPeVAC), which was launched for achieving the target 16.2 of the SDGs, Japan declared in February 2018 its intention to become a pathfinding country under this initiative. In addition, the Government of Japan provided support amounting to approximately six million US dollars to the “Fund to End Violence Against Children”, as the first contributor to the fund’s humanitarian window. This contribution is used to protect children facing threats from violence in such countries as Nigeria and Uganda. Furthermore, as requested by civil society,

the Government organized a seminar on related matters and held a preliminary meeting to set up a multi-stakeholder platform in order to deepen discussions with representatives of civil society. We call on all governments around the world to join us in these efforts.

Madame Chairperson, Distinguished Members of the Committee,

In wrapping up, the Government of Japan is keen to continue to lead discussions in the international community on respecting and ensuring the rights of the child in order to realize a better world where children could have dreams and hopes for their future. No one should be complacent regarding the promotion of children's rights. And Japan surely does not intend to do so. The Japanese delegation is ready to listen carefully and provide answers with utmost sincerity on any matters of concern you may have during this important dialogue. We look forward to discussions today and tomorrow with all of you here today.

Thank you very much.