

**Opening Speech by H.E. Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan,  
at the Open Forum, World Assembly for Women in Tokyo: WAW! Tokyo 2014**

September 12, 2014      Tokyo, Japan

I wish to extend my warm welcome to you today as you participate in the “World Assembly for Women in Tokyo: WAW! Tokyo 2014.”

“Creating a society in which women shine” has consistently been one of my highest priority issues since the launch of my administration in December 2012. Why have I been so enthusiastic in working on women’s active engagement in society? Naturally, it is not because I was cajoled into it by my wife Akie, who also joins us here today. She is sometimes called “the domestic opposition party.” However, I can proclaim that with regard to the dynamic engagement of women, there are no differences whatsoever between us.

I reshuffled my Cabinet on September 3<sup>rd</sup>. In particular, my appointment of five women as Cabinet ministers received a great deal of attention, and that number is said to be equal to the highest number ever in Japan. In fact, I also appointed a woman to the important post of Chair of the Liberal Democratic Party’s Policy Research Council, so to be accurate, I should state that this is the highest number ever.

At summit meetings there have been times when the Japanese side comprised exclusively men in dark-colored suits while women accounted for more than half the people attending on behalf of our counterpart. I was overly stubborn in looking up some statistics, thinking that from now on, Japan would be able to hold its head high. Through the reshuffle, the number of female Cabinet members in Japan advanced remarkably, from 29<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> among all OECD member countries.

Of course, there are still other countries that outshine us. Although Japan has not yet reached the very highest tier, the landscape of politics in Japan will also change. All of these female Cabinet members and ruling party board members are people of excellence brimming with ability and drive. I am firmly convinced that they will be dynamically

engaged in their duties to the fullest.

### *Diversity generates new values*

As you are well aware, we cannot say that today's Japan is a "straight-A" model student in appointing women to executive positions. The proportion of women among the members of the National Diet remains low, at 11 per cent.

That is why we must act now. Japan has set a target of having women occupy 30 per cent of leadership positions by 2020.

A survey conducted among the top 500 corporations chosen by *Fortune* magazine concluded that companies having three or more female board directors boast profitability that is more than 80 per cent higher than companies with no women on the board, while also attracting stock investments.

Women's ideas are beginning to be utilized in product development at Japanese companies as well.

Using a concept put forth by a team comprised mainly of women, a car was developed with doors that open wide, making it easy for people holding children to get in and out. I understand that this became the top-selling car for five months in a row.

Upon the suggestion of a female employee, a laptop computer made in collaboration with a jewelry brand adopted a design that a user can open it without damaging her fingernails, making it a popular seller.

Women bring to corporate management certain perspectives that only women can provide. Diversified organizations are able to provide society with new types of added value.

### *Supporting corporate efforts to appoint women to executive positions*

Saying I would like all listed companies to appoint at least one woman to their boards, I have been urging the Japanese business community to take concrete actions towards appointing women to executive positions. Female directors have emerged one after another at financial institutions, trading companies, and other business categories that

in Japan have heretofore been considered male workplaces.

I intend to accelerate this still further. There has been a trend in various countries to disclose information on the state of women on boards of directors. This autumn Japan too will revise the system governing securities reports to require companies to include information on the number of female board members. For companies working on promoting women, we will expand the opportunities for them to receive government procurement orders. We will also provide subsidies to those companies that newly pursue the appointment of women to executive ranks. Furthermore, by promoting the spread of “telework” utilizing information technology, we will pursue the realization of a flexible working style.

*Providing support for balancing employment with child-rearing*

We have been working to stimulate economic growth while also making various efforts to support the dynamic engagement of women. As a result, the number of working women in Japan has increased by some 530 thousand over this past year.

Many women wish to continue to engage in satisfying work as long as possible. A large number of women are also working hard to be active within their companies in pursuit of promotion. At the same time, the reality in Japan is that 60 per cent of women quit their jobs after the birth of their first child.

There are also those who quit their jobs for the time being in order to raise their children but wish to work again. Still others want to focus on family matters until they finish their child-rearing or nursing care responsibilities. Some others wish to become permanent employees.

I believe that each of these choices is valuable, and that all of these paths are valid. I wish to support women who are following with confidence the path they chose. I will work to take on all issues that hinder women’s active engagement.

And yet, a large number of women worry about balancing child-rearing and work in order to continue working or resume their jobs. We must eliminate the phrase “childcare waiting lists” from the Japanese lexicon. Having set a target of securing childcare facility

openings for 200 thousand children over two years by March 2015, we have already secured arrangements for 190 thousand children. By securing additional space for 200 thousand children over three years from next April, we will conclusively achieve and continue along the path to eliminating childcare waiting lists without fail.

There are also a great many vibrant women who launch new businesses or embark on activities that contribute to society rather than work at companies.

In Fukushima, which was struck by the Great East Japan Earthquake, women dairy farmers suffering reputational damage from radiation-related rumors used their ingenuity to develop a stew that uses locally sourced milk and beef. This became a hit item, with sales of as many as two thousand meals in less than six months. Another woman, noticing the high quality of African leather, began a company supporting women who craft the leather materials used in her business of making bags with sophisticated designs.

One mother who quit her job when she had a child launched a childcare support base in her local community, making use of her own child-rearing experiences. Considering these efforts too valuable to stay limited to only her local area, she founded a non-profit organization and began working to spread that know-how nationwide.

There are many women who have dreams of starting a business or being of service to society at large through NPO activities. In order to enable those people to be as dynamically engaged as they wish, we will provide tailor-made support from the time of start-up until the business is running smoothly.

Beginning in fiscal 2015, as a part of strengthening our support for childcare and child-rearing, we will introduce a new professional qualification of “childcare supporter” so that at childcare facilities these people are able to make use of their child-rearing experiences. Raising a child is also a wonderful career. I am hoping to see many women take up the challenge of undertaking such businesses as childcare or child-rearing support based on their experience.

We will work to bring about by 2020 a society in which all women can try to achieve their dreams at any life stage. This October, centering on Minister Arimura, Japan’s

Minister in Charge of Promoting Women's Active Participation, we will compile a "Package to Support All Women Who Shine".

### *Changing the rules of the game*

The other day I met with women working in the construction and transportation industries. They said, "It is rewarding to take on substantial work assignments at the scale of developing entire communities," and "The smiles on the faces of my customers when I deliver packages to them are the most important thing of all." And yet, these have been male-dominated workplaces until now. It is my understanding that as women themselves roll up their sleeves, there is an expanding movement to improve the work environment and revise working hours in order to make it easier for women to work there.

I believe that there remain a large number of men who take pride in how little they sleep and have misconstrued being "exceedingly busy" as "extremely productive." As the number of women in the workplace increases and they come to have responsibility for important decisions, the rules for working will change and productivity will increase.

Japan's efforts to create a society in which women shine have only just begun. The most difficult part may be transforming the division of roles based on gender, something that is, unwittingly, firmly ingrained within us. It is deeply regrettable that we still encounter remarks that should be called sexual harassment.

However, we can see laudable changes as well. In May this year, male leaders of some of Japan's best-known corporations formed a group of male leaders who will create "A Society in Which Women Shine" and released a Declaration on Action to support women's dynamic engagement.

Creating a society in which women shine does not mean hanging up a signboard saying "Women Actively Promoted Here." It means changing the consciousness of each individual. It means incorporating the unique perspectives of women into corporate management. Women will come to shoulder important decision-making. They will also change the way we work. So it means changing the rules of the game that penetrate society.

*A world in which all people shine*

I want to spread this transformation to the entire world. We must bring about a world in which all people, both women and men, shine.

At the UN General Assembly last year, I spoke of my determination towards supporting women. We have been moving forward steadily in implementing the ODA I pledged. While I will introduce more detailed information about this progress at tomorrow's international symposium, Japan will continue its support towards the resolution of issues involving women.

*Now is the time to act*

Changes are now underway. And we have just now come to stand at the starting line. I am pleased to tell you that more than 100 events related to this symposium have been and will be held throughout Japan, as well as in over 20 countries. I will stand at the forefront as we work to build a society in which all people—both men and women—shine. I hope you join me in taking action now.