

Statement by Foreign Minister KAMIKAWA Yoko
at the 2nd Global Refugee Forum
(December 13, 2023)

1 Introduction

Distinguished Heads of States and Governments,
Distinguished High Commissioner,
Excellencies,
Distinguished participants,

The number of forced displacements has more than doubled in the last decade alone.

This meant that for the first time last year, 114 million people worldwide were forced to leave their homes.

This surge is due to prolonged man-made conflicts around the world.

While refugees are still unable to return to their home countries, new crises are causing more outflows.

And recent intensified natural disasters caused by climate change have further worsened this situation.

Syrian children who were only five when the crisis began are now 17 years old.

Young refugees are spending their childhoods in refugee camps.

Their vast potential is being lost and human dignity itself is under threat.

If this situation continues unchanged, global forced displacements will continue to increase.

From the perspective of human security, we must unite in listening to the voices of each and every refugee and displaced person, and doing everything we can to address the worsening humanitarian situation.

2 Japan's Basic Approach

Japan places great importance on humanitarian assistance for vulnerable populations.

We have provided more than 5 billion dollars since the last GRF.

We will continue to advocate humanitarianism and to implement strong support over the next four years.

When providing humanitarian assistance, it is essential to ensure the safety of humanitarian personnel.

For their training, Japan has recently decided to promote the establishment of an African “e-Center” in Nairobi.

This initiative is based on the model of our existing support to the e-Center in Bangkok.

We hope this will contribute to ensuring greater safety of humanitarian personnel in Africa.

On the other hand, we cannot significantly improve the situation by merely providing food, water, and shelter to vulnerable people.

We must adopt a more future-oriented, medium- to long-term approach.

On October 2nd, just before the terrorist attack by Hamas, three school students from Gaza visited my office to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Japan-UNRWA partnership.

One of them shared with me her dream, I quote:

“I would like to become a scientist to create a world where war does not harm the environment.”

I believe that we must all envision a future where each and every refugee and displaced person can talk about their dreams, and have opportunities to work hard to make their dreams come true.

Japan is helping refugees and displaced persons become independent through education and vocational training.

We strongly encourage them to develop their abilities so they can contribute to peace and reconstruction at home.

Among the displaced, women and children are particularly vulnerable.

The concept of WPS emphasizes moving closer to sustaining peace through active participation of women as leaders in conflict prevention, reconstruction and peace-building while also protecting women and girls.

It is essential to addressing forced displacement with WPS in mind.

Japan will emphasize gender mainstreaming and women's participation and leadership in all processes of humanitarian assistance, development cooperation, and peace efforts.

3 Japan's efforts to support the self-reliance of the displaced overseas

Distinguished participants,

Japan continues to support the self-reliance of refugees and displaced persons.

In Ukraine, Russian aggression has taken away the opportunity to learn from many children.

To help children study in more secure environments, Japan will make a new contribution to the global fund for education in crises, Education Cannot Wait (ECW).

In Afghanistan, women's empowerment is an ongoing challenge.

Japan and UNDP are together supporting businesses managed by women through providing equipment and improving access to finance.

Bangladesh is host to one million displaced Rohingya people.

The Japanese private sector has been playing an important role in addressing the situation.

An example of this is UNIQLO's work with UNHCR to help displaced women acquire sewing skills and produce sanitary napkins.

4 Japan's efforts to support the self-reliance of the displaced in Japan

We have also been providing support for the displaced at home.

JICA has been supporting Syrian refugees to study in Japan since 2017.

To date, about 80 students have been accepted and over 80% of graduates have found employment in Japan.

I was particularly touched by the words of one of them who said “Instead of losing hope, now I can dream.”

This year, JICA will launch a new program to provide study opportunities in Japan for the forcibly displaced from other countries and regions.

We will also steadily implement the expansion of refugee resettlement in Japan as announced at the last GRF.

Japan has hosted and assisted over 2,500 displaced Ukrainians.

Japan also established a system to ensure protection of conflict-displaced persons and others.

Japan will provide such support and protection in cooperation with NGOs, businesses, and universities.

5 Japan's efforts to ease the pressures on host countries

Distinguished participants,

The dreams of forcibly displaced people should never be realized at the expense of host countries, who are reaching the limits of their capacity to cope with the increased and protracted forced displacements around the world.

Japan will continue to work to ease the pressures on these countries.

For instance, Jordan is currently facing a water shortage crisis.

This is due to population growth caused by the acceptance of refugees and climate change.

We have been providing assistance for three decades for stable water supply in the country.

In Latin America, more than 7.7 million displaced Venezuelans have fled to neighboring countries.

Japan, in cooperation with UNHCR, continues to support the economic and social inclusion of the displaced in host countries.

Japan is also strengthening cooperation with multilateral development banks.

This includes support for the GCFF—a World Bank-hosted facility designed to reduce borrowing costs for middle-income host countries.

In February, Japan became the largest GCFF donor with a contribution of approximately 83 million dollars.

6 Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus

To support both the forcibly displaced and host community members in realizing their dreams, Japan has launched the HDP Nexus multi-stakeholder pledge as a platform for collaboration among donor and host countries, international organizations, and other actors.

In this respect, Uganda provides an example of good practices. The Ugandan government, JICA and UNHCR have been collaborating to provide training in rice production to refugees and host communities to improve their livelihoods.

We provide similar assistance for Colombia and Zambia, and plan to expand this to Kenya and Ethiopia.

In addition, we intend to contribute to regional peace and stability through the AU and IGAD.

7 Addressing conflict, and conclusion

Distinguished participants,

Conflict is a major factor of forced displacement.

At the root of conflicts are political failures and lack of leadership.

As a result, ordinary citizens, including children, women, and the elderly, are forced into dire situations.

As stated by Madam OGATA Sadako:

“The High Commissioner for Refugees can help save people’s lives and ease some of their suffering, but cannot resolve conflicts.”

Indeed, the resolution of conflicts is truly the responsibility of politicians, such as myself and many others here today.

Concerning the current humanitarian crisis in Gaza, we must deescalate the situation with utmost urgency.

Japan has decided to provide approximately 75 million dollars of humanitarian assistance while providing emergency goods through JICA.

To prevent such a tragedy from reoccurring, we will continue to work with the countries concerned, including Israel and Palestine, to realize a two-state solution.

Japan is not only a co-convenor of the GRF, but also this year's G7 Presidency and a member of the UN Security Council.

Allow me to conclude my statement by conveying Japan's strong commitment to continue to strive for peace and stability in the international community.

Thank you very much.