

**Speech by H.E. Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan,
at the Opening Session of the High Level Round Table,
World Assembly for Women in Tokyo: WAW! Tokyo 2014**
September 13, 2014 Tokyo, Japan

Good morning, everyone.

Today, people dynamically engaged across a broad spectrum of fields have gathered here from twenty-four countries, six international organizations, and Japan. Women active in various fields have come together under one roof from around the world to hold comprehensive discussions. I consider it an honor for Japan to host this meeting.

In Japan we have an expression “a single fleck of red” which means a single flower blooming beautifully amidst all the green, implying a sole woman to be amidst a sea of men. Today it is just the opposite, but disregarding any sense of feeling isolated, I will summon my courage, and participate in these discussions and experience your powerful energy.

At the 2013 UN General Assembly

“To create a society in which women shine”—that was the pledge I made exactly a year ago at the United Nations General Assembly. This WAW! symposium is one step towards making that pledge a reality.

Japan is a country that takes action and upholds its pledges. I recognize that the situation of women differs from country to country. However, I am certain that you who have gathered here today all share the common wish of wanting to make the future brighter for women. I want to make this forum a starting point from which we share our wisdom and discover solutions.

Ensuring fundamental rights such as education and health

Surveying the globe, we still find lamentable situations in which women are deprived of opportunities to be self-reliant and are unable to have access to medical care, education, or other

basic services merely because they were born women. Moreover, there is a history of profound harm to women's honor and dignity during conflicts.

Based on the deep remorse, I am determined to make the 21st century a world with no human rights violations against women. I wish to hold this firm determination in common with you.

In some rural communities in Pakistan, the school enrollment rate for girls between the age of 10 and 12 has been less than 10 per cent. With a view to creating more favorable environment for girls to attend school, Japan is assisting the construction of schools for girls and the improvement of relevant facilities.

The fundamental rights, such as education and health must be ensured throughout the world. It is necessary for the world to come together as one to take action so that girls and boys can attend school equally, and that expectant mothers can receive medical care with peace of mind.

Economic self-reliance improves the status of women

Moreover, in order for women to lead lives full of pride and hope, I consider it essential for them to acquire the ability to be economically self-reliant.

In January this year I visited a vocational training facility for women in Côte d'Ivoire. With the sewing machines provided by Japan, the trainees learned sewing and crafted clothing and bags in gorgeous colors. I cannot forget the trainees' sparkling eyes and smiling faces as they proudly showed me their completed pieces.

I have heard that in Kenya, toy animals made of felt crafted by mothers living in the slums have become a major hit product. In the slums there are many cases of women

becoming single mothers at a young age. A Japanese woman, Ms. Teruko Kikumoto, set up a vocational training studio and started teaching how to make toy animals. The mothers now buy the materials themselves and even keep account ledgers. I hear that original design ideas are also emerging.

We are assisting women around the world so that they can acquire skills and then use them to support family finances and become economically self-reliant. Japan intends to continue to support women as they take on challenges in every corner of the world.

Continuing support around the world

Last year I pledged in my address at the UN General Assembly that Japan would implement assistance in excess of US\$3 billion over three years that places women at the center. That assistance is now steadily being implemented. US\$1.8 billion in assistance was already implemented. The activities of Ms. Kikumoto in Kenya have also bloomed with our ODA boosting the enthusiasm of all those involved.

In addition, I stated that “Japan respects the activities of UN Women, which is responsible for women’s issues within the United Nations. We intend to become one of its leading contributors and thus an exemplary country in the area.” Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN Women’s Executive Director, is here with us today. Over the past year, Japan increased its contributions to UN Women fivefold. We will increase the number of projects which we support. Moreover, we have great news today. UN Women is opening its Japan Office next year. Japan will further enhance its coordination with the UN through this new office.

Conclusion

In preparation for next year's 20th anniversary of the World Conference on Women in Beijing, UN Women has launched a campaign. This month's theme is "women and the economy." Japan is taking charge of this, and it is our intention to share the outcomes of this symposium with the world.

In Japan we have a proverb that says, "Wisdom derives from the counsel of three people." Today, it is not three but one hundred people that have come together. I hope that you each shower us with your particular knowledge and provide recommendations that will lead to concrete actions by which women around the world, together with men, take part in creating a society in which women shine. Let us send out a message that reaches far and wide.

These efforts, which we may call a social revolution, will surely not be completed within a year. I ask all of you to kindly take back to your home countries the outcomes of this symposium. And, let us come together once more in Tokyo next year.

Thank you very much.