

Remarks by
Mrs. Lin Kobayashi, Founder and Chair of the Board of
International School of Asia, Karuizawa
At the UN High-Level Political Forum 2017

Thank you, Minister Kishida, for your kind introduction.

ISAK'S MISSION

(Slide 1: Graduation photo with the Founders)

Today I'm here because three years ago, my colleagues and I founded Japan's first international boarding high school where we empower our students to become change agents for peace and a sustainable future. This project has been supported by over a thousand people in Japan, including more than one hundred founders who contributed significantly to make this school a reality. It demonstrates how so many people in our country share our interest and passion for a more sustainable future.

(Slide 2: Map of where students are from + pie chart that shows 70% scholarship)

Because we truly believe in inclusion and diversity, we provide need-based scholarships for nearly 70% of our students. As a result, our students come not only from affluent families but also from all sorts of different backgrounds. There are students from countries like Afghanistan and Somalia, from single parent families in Japan, and also from a very disadvantaged family in India whose annual household income is no more than a few hundred dollars.

(Slide 3: Project week discussion)

We also strongly believe in student autonomy and giving students ownership of their learning and their lives. Almost every single co-curricular activity is student-initiated and student-led because that is the only way for them to learn to become change agents in their real life.

ISAK AS A BEACON FOR CHANGE

(Slide 4: Calendar showing "2007 – Ideation")

My co-founder and I dreamt of such a school almost ten years ago, when I was still a Programme Officer with UNICEF Philippines. When I came back to Japan to start the ISAK project, my co-Founder and I only had 30,000 U.S. dollars in our bank account.

(Slide 5: Calendar showing “2008 – Financial Crisis”)

Because we were immediately hit by the financial crisis, it became extremely difficult to raise any funds. We met person after person, asking for their contribution, and kept being turned down. For the first couple of years, we saw almost no success.

(Slide 6: Calendar showing “2011 – Tohoku Earthquake”)

As soon as we were able to find several initial donors, the Tohoku Earthquake shook our country. More than forty appointments that we had lined up with potential donors got cancelled. All of them. It took us another two years until we were finally able to gather 15 million dollars to build...

(Slide 7: ISAK Campus)

Our school. Throughout this project, I became deeply appreciative of the power of the private sector in Japan, and how it brought this non-profit project to realization and how it is still helping us to grow.

(Slide 8: Growing Campus)

To date, we have raised over 40 million dollars both to expand our campus and to sustain our robust scholarship program.

ISAK’S STUDENT STORY

I’d like to finish off by talking about how our education is transforming our students into change agents and what impact they are making in the world.

(Slide 9: Yuichiro)

Yuichiro just graduated from our high school last month. He came from a local public school in Hyogo. It was in his very first year with us when the devastating earthquake hit Nepal and destroyed small remote villages in the Himalayas where his classmate was from.

(Slide 10: Nepal Project)

Yuichiro and his classmates ended up initiating a restoration project in those villages around the epicenter, gathering over 60,000 dollars through online and offline fundraising campaigns. They rehabilitated thirteen temporary schools, three medical camps and a health post.

–This is only one example of what education can do to the minds of a young person.

(Slide 11: Graduation photo)

There are so many obstacles and challenges when we try to tackle our social problems, and it is very easy to become pessimistic about it. But the future is something that *we* create. If we can strongly believe in this, we can and should take action. During their three years of education at our high school, we hope that our students are empowered to have enough confidence in themselves and are equipped with skills and experiences to support their efforts in creating positive change.

I hope and trust we will see much more projects in the near future that demonstrates the power of education *and* the younger generation. Because, as Minister Kishida said in his speech earlier, “The key to achieving SDGs is the empowerment of children and youth”.

Thank you.