

Speech by H.E. Mr Hisashi Tokunaga, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for
Foreign Affairs at the reception

“The International Symposium
Universal Coverage in the 21st Century: Redefining Japan’s Health System”

Wednesday, September 1, 2010

I think it was very innovative and meaningful that today, those working in the field of healthcare gathered both from Japan and from abroad, and discussed how Japan’s experience and the lessons learned from its universal coverage could contribute to solving global health issues.

I hereby express my respect to the organizers, President Tadashi Yamamoto of Japan Center for International Exchange and Mr. Richard Horton, Editor in Chief of Lancet, and to the distinguished participants.

Japan has regarded health issues as global issues that relate directly to human security, and thus has placed importance on it in its diplomatic policy.

I take this year to be a milestone year for reviewing our work on health issues.

At the G8 Muskoka Summit held in June, issues related to maternal, newborn and child health was discussed as the top-priority agenda, and for Japan, Prime Minister Kan made a pledge that, under the “Muskoka initiative” Japan would provide additional assistance up to 50 billion yen, or about 500 million US dollars, in the 5 years from 2011.

At the end of this month, UN Summit that meets once every 5 years will be held, and the Millennium Development Goals is tabled as a theme to be discussed.

At the UN Summit, past efforts will be reviewed, and at the same time there will be discussions on what the international community must do in the remaining 5 years before the deadline to achieve the MDGs.

Taking this political opportunity, our country will present Japan’s new global health policy, and will announce to the world what Japan ought to do in the next 5 years to achieve the health-related MDGs.

Progress towards achieving health related MDGs is falling behind, but there have been remarkable achievements as well. For example, in 1990, number of under-five deaths was over 10 million per year, now it has reduced to 8.8 million per year.

However, the progress is unequal between regions, or between countries, or even within a same country. Also, neonatal mortality rate and maternal mortality ratio has fallen far behind that progress.

The biggest problem is that many pregnant women lose their lives without getting quality preventive and clinical services at facilities.

We must not overlook the current situation under which women and children may not receive health services equally because they are vulnerable existence.

In developing countries, in order to ensure equal access, establishment of innovative and sustainable health systems will be the key (an essential factor).

Upon formulation of the “Muskoka Initiative” which was agreed at the G8 Muskoka Summit, the importance of strengthening health systems was included, based on the proposal made by Japan.

Also at the G8 Summit meeting, Prime Minister Kan appealed for the need for the continuum of care from pre-pregnancy to childhood

Japan will take this effort even further, by announcing at the MDGs Summit our assistance measures, which will strengthen health systems in developing countries through international cooperation, and will thereby take health MDGs forward.

The implementation of this new international health policy and achievement of our goals, Japan cannot do it alone.

In order to maximize the outcomes of development within limited time, it is indispensable that all of us working in the field of international health, from government, the private sector and academia, combine our resources, i.e. our knowledge, experience, technology and capital.

Japan will aim at making the new policy a cornerstone and an engine for our integrated effort. I would like to humbly ask for your kind cooperation.

Thank you very much for your attention.