
C. CONSULAR FUNCTIONS AND MEASURES FOR THE PROTECTION OF JAPANESE TRAVELING AND LIVING ABROAD

(a) Fundamental Reform of Consular Services

Of all the duties of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it is consular services through which the ministry has most direct contact with the people and that are the most closely related to people's lives. Consular services are in fact one of the two major duties of the ministry, along with diplomacy. Reflecting the importance of consular services, the Outline of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Reform Programs, which was announced in June 2001 in response to recommendations from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Reform Council, laid out the direction for the fundamental reform of consular services.

To advance this policy, a project team was established under the leadership of Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs Toshio Kojima. The team undertook three-pronged considerations concerning (1) the promotion of changes in the consciousness of staff and the improvement of training; (2) the improvement of consular services; and (3) the improvement and expansion of mechanisms for protecting Japanese nationals. The project team has already produced several results.

In regard to reforming staff consciousness and strengthening training, a system requiring higher diplomatic service officers and specialists to serve at consular sections following overseas training will be institutionalized as of FY 2002. In terms of consular services at the windows, opening hours have been extended, after-hours telephone services improved, and facilities in waiting rooms upgraded to improve user convenience, particularly at diplomatic and consular establishments. To improve and expand the protection of Japanese nationals, measures to combat international terrorism have been pursued, including efforts toward concluding the relevant conventions, the strengthening of the systems of passport issuance and management, and consultations with other developed countries concerning passport forgeries. Information and Communications Technology (IT) advances have also been utilized to deploy the Japanese Nationals Protection System using the Global Positioning System (GPS) and Communication Equipment (JANPS) and to launch a wide-area network for visa information (the visa WAN), which opens the way for detailed and efficient investigation at the visa issuance stage as terrorists and other unwelcome foreigners attempt to enter the country.

The ministry will continue with studies in this area and will endeavor to secure the safety of Japanese nationals abroad as well as to provide more convenient consular services.

(b) Promotion of Safety Measures in Exchanges of Persons across Borders

In 2001, the number of Japanese nationals traveling abroad reached 16.21 million, while the total number of Japanese living abroad reached around 837,000 (as of October 1, 2001). Consequently, the number of cases in which Japanese nationals are involved in accidents and incidents abroad is on the rise. In 2000, there were 14,752 cases where help was extended to 17,091 Japanese nationals abroad. Prominent cases included the February incident in which the *Ehime Maru*, a fisheries training vessel operated by Ehime Prefecture's Uwajima Fisheries High School, was struck by a U.S. nuclear-powered submarine off Hawaii and sank, with nine of those on board gone missing or found dead; the kidnapping of a Japanese citizen in Colombia in February; the case in April in Istanbul, Turkey, in which a number of Japanese nationals (12 at the time of release) were temporarily taken hostage by armed forces barricaded in a hotel; and the September terrorist attacks in the United States, which left 24 Japanese missing or found dead. In each case, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided an optimal response with a view to protecting the parties involved and their families. These incidents highlight the fact that not only ordinary crimes but also all other forms of threat, including serious accidents and terrorism, cross the national boundaries.

In 2001, 5.27 million foreigners entered Japan, while 1.69 million are resident in Japan. While promoting exchanges of persons with other countries, it is also one of the ministry's important duties to prevent terrorists and other foreign persons who might cause problems from entering the country.

It is important that safety measures abroad be promoted with the emphasis on both prevention (the preventive approach) and an accurate response to incidents (the ex post facto approach), taking a comprehensive perspective in collaboration with other countries and related ministries.

The most critical means of prevention is the provision of accurate information and public relations to Japanese nationals. The ministry provides the public with a broad range of information on countries and regions around the world with a view to protecting the safety of Japanese nationals and helping them to avoid trouble. For example, the ministry offers information not only on the emergence or possible emergence of situations that could adversely affect the physical safety and lives of Japanese citizens, such as a deterioration in civil order, disturbances, and terrorism; but it also offers the basic data necessary for taking appropriate safety measures and for avoiding trouble on trips abroad, such as the general civil order of a given location, crime trends (status, modus operandi, etc.), visas and arrival and departure procedures, and health care and hygiene. This highly detailed

security information can be obtained by fax and telephone, through touch screen terminals placed at major international airports in Japan, as well as from the Website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Strengthened systems of passport issuance and management, forgery countermeasures, and rigorous visa issuance policies are effective means of preventing international crime. In recent years, there have been a great many cases where passports and other travel documents have been forged or altered by international criminal organizations and international terrorists and used illegally, which makes stronger countermeasures in regard to travel document forgery an international concern. Recognizing that the building up of an effective cooperation system with other countries is essential in preventing such abuse, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs held the Second Workshop on Passport Policy, in December, inviting passport-issuing authorities and forgery countermeasure experts from four developed countries. Through such measures, the ministry is striving to strengthen passport issuance and management systems, to improve forgery prevention technology, and to develop information networks.

The number of foreigners entering Japan and the number of foreigners registering as foreign residents in Japan have both been gradually increasing. Meanwhile, the number of foreigners who have illegally overstayed the duration of their landing permits has remained above 200,000 ever since it suddenly increased to that level in 1992. Crimes committed by some of these illegal residents not only portray to the Japanese public an erroneous image of foreigners living in Japan, but may also obstruct sound international exchange. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is working to prevent foreigners from entering Japan for the purposes of working and residing illegally through the strict examination of visa applications. Regular consultations have also been held with those countries from which many citizens enter Japan, in an attempt to resolve problems at the consular level.

At the same time, to facilitate the transnational mobility of people and promote exchanges of persons, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has also worked continuously to simplify and expedite visa procedures. Specific measures such as the easing of visa procedures for foreign IT engineers have been taken in this regard, which is also consistent with the government's deregulation policies. As of 2002, visa regulations will be substantially relaxed with the Republic of Korea (ROK), not only to contribute to the success of the FIFA World Cup jointly hosted by Japan and the ROK, but also to promote medium- and long-term visits between the two countries.

To promote public awareness on these measures, various activities were held on such occasions designated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as the Week for the Safety Promotion of Japanese Nationals Overseas, in June and November 2001, as well as a Passport Day in February. The ministry also regularly holds seminars regarding overseas safety and provides Japanese firms expanding their businesses overseas and travel agencies with general safety information.

(c) Supporting Comfortable Living Abroad

With the number of Japanese living abroad growing every year, the activities of Japanese consulates to secure the safety of Japanese nationals and to facilitate their comfortable overseas activities have become increasingly complex and diverse. As part of the government's efforts to improve the social welfare of Japanese nationals living abroad, the ministry has long been providing support to overseas Japanese schools and Japanese supplementary schools in conjunction with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. In the area of health, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has since 1972 been dispatching traveling teams of medical doctors with the cooperation of Japanese medical institutions, primarily for health consultations with Japanese nationals living in developing countries, especially those in tropical regions with poor medical conditions. The ministry also works to disseminate information regarding the spread of infectious diseases through information releases from the Overseas Security Information Center and others, based on information received from the World Health Organization (WHO) and from each country's government. In addition, the ministry has in recent years been working to promote related measures in new areas, such as eliminating duplicate contributions to pension funds and dealing with issues regarding computing the total length of payment, as well as simplifying the procedures for obtaining driver's licenses abroad.

In line with the 1998 promulgation of the Act Revising Portions of the Public Offices Election Law, Japanese living abroad are now able to participate in national elections. Duties related to balloting abroad are an important issue in terms of enabling the public to exercise their voting rights. Following the House of Representatives election of June 2000, balloting by overseas Japanese residents took place again for the House of Councilors election in July 2001, with approximately 22,000 Japanese residing abroad exercising their voting rights. To ballot abroad, eligible voters must register in advance. Japanese overseas diplomatic and consular missions have implemented public relations activities concerning this new system, and consulate staff is traveling around the countries where they are posted to register additional votes. As of the end of 2001, approximately 75,000 Japanese residing abroad had registered to vote in future elections.

(d) Cooperation with Overseas Nikkei Communities

The history of Japanese emigration now stretches back over 130 years, and at present the number of Japanese emigrants and their descendants living abroad, mostly in the North and South Americas, is estimated to be in the order of 2.5 million, including 1.3 million in Brazil and 1 million in the United States. These Nikkei (Japanese emigrants and descendants) are highly acclaimed in their respective countries for their activities in wide-ranging fields, including politics, administration, economy, academia, and culture,

as well as for their positive contributions to economic and social development. They also play a critical role in promoting mutual understanding and amicable relations between Japan and their countries of residence.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has extended its assistance in line with the changing needs of overseas communities of Nikkei, including welfare issues accompanying the aging of immigrants, assistance to those who cannot help themselves, human resources development, and the utilization of Nikkei human resources in economic and technical cooperation. Measures that are no longer in tune with the times have also been reviewed, ensuring effective policy implementation. Aid for second- and third-generation Nikkei in particular focuses on the intake of technical trainees with a view to human resources development and technical cooperation provided through Nikkei people; while in the area of Japanese language education, measures include language training programs and the dispatch of Japanese language teachers to local Japanese language schools. Scholarships for study in Japan have also been established for Nikkei students, as a part of measures designed to enable Nikkei to act as a bridge between Japan and their countries of residence. Precious materials are being recorded and stored to ensure accurate understanding of the history of emigration to date, while an exhibition facility of emigration-related materials will be established in the Yokohama International Center (provisional title), which is scheduled to open in 2002. The exhibition facility is intended for use by Nikkei and the general public.

(e) Utilizing Information and Communications Technology for Consular Purposes

The enormous Information and Communications Technology (IT) advances of recent years have been fully integrated into consular duties and reflected in a variety of measures. Specific examples include the introduction of GPS, as noted above, the development of machine-readable passports and visas, strengthened information provision through Websites and e-mail magazines, improvement of the database of Japanese nationals residing abroad, and the Internet-based instantaneous sharing of information between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and diplomatic and consular establishments.

Overseas Voting and the Federation of Prefectures' Associations of Japan in Brazil

In accordance with the 1998 revision of portions of the Public Offices Election Law, Japanese residing abroad are now permitted to participate in national elections. There are reportedly more than 600,000 such eligible voters living abroad. Approximately 250,000 Japanese moved to Brazil before and after the Second World War, and many Japanese have passed away in Brazil during the more than 90-year history of Japanese immigration in that country. There are now a vast number of people who have ties to both Japan and Brazil, including Japanese who returned to Japan from Brazil, individuals who were born and live in Brazil but maintain their Japanese citizenship, and the approximately 250,000 Japanese-Brazilians who are temporarily living in Japan in order to work. While there are no conclusive figures on the number of people living in Brazil who are eligible to vote in Japanese national elections, many of these eligible voters are now elderly since more than 30 years have passed since the last great wave of immigration from Japan to Brazil ebbed away.

The Consulate-General of Japan in Sao Paulo conducted a campaign to register eligible voters with the cooperation of three local Japanese-Brazilian newspapers (one of which is no longer publishing), and this campaign was supported by the Federation of Prefectures' Associations of Japan in Brazil (the federation) and by local Japanese associations in various parts of the country. The Consulate-General registered voters at local Japanese associations' meeting halls with the federation's assistance, and a large number of Japanese nationals residing in Brazil have registered to vote. During the House of Representatives election of June 2000, which was the first balloting by overseas Japanese residents, many Japanese nationals visited the federation's offices, registered to vote, requested voting forms, or asked questions about the voting procedures. Many of those who voted in that election were elderly people voting for the first time in decades, or who had never voted before. Some came asking to have their names removed from the voter registration lists, explaining that they had already registered but would not be able to participate in the election for one reason or another. To give the votes cast by Japanese residing abroad the same weight as those cast by voters in Japan, in addition to conducting voter registration campaigns, it is also essential to provide expatriate Japanese with information about Japanese political groups and the electoral system itself.

Regardless of the reasons why Japanese reside abroad or what their individual occupations may be, these overseas Japanese live in daily contact with non-Japanese, and thus, in effect, they serve as informal, private-sector Japanese diplomats. We hope Japanese who reside abroad can emphasize their presence as Japanese and be accepted in this manner. If they can live proudly as Japanese in this way, we believe the number of Japanese residing abroad who register to vote in Japanese national elections will increase.

In Japan, voter participation is reportedly very low in major urban centers, with the number declining in inverse proportion to population density. Similarly, the percentage of Japanese residing in Brazil who have registered to vote is especially high in outlying regions and other areas with active Japanese associations, while it is not necessarily all that high in Sao Paulo, which has the highest concentration of Japanese nationals. Grassroots efforts will have to be developed to increase voter participation and to make Japan's overseas voting system more meaningful, and the Federation of Prefectures' Associations of Japan in Brazil will continue to cooperate with the registration of more eligible voters, working in cooperation with the Consulate-General of Japan in Sao Paulo.

The Secretariat of the Federation of Prefectures' Associations of Japan
in Brazil