

APEC Women and the Economy Forum
High Level Political Dialogue
By Hiroshi Okada
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22nd of May, 2014

(Introduction)

Thank you, Madame Chair.

Her Excellency SONG Xiuyan, Minister, Vice President of the National Committee on Women and Children under the State Council, Vice President and First Member of All China Women's Federation, the People's Republic of China and Distinguished Delegates:

I would like to express my appreciation for making an opportunity to speak at the High Level Political Dialogue on APEC Women and the Economy Forum.

I would also like to pay my respects to the government of the People's Republic of China for hosting this remarkable forum.

(Outcome of active participation by women in Japan)

Last year, Masako Mori, Minister of State for Gender Equality had an opportunity to speak at this forum, held in Indonesia, about our actions to promote active participation by women in Japan.

The Abe Cabinet puts "WOMENOMICS" as the core of his growth strategy, and is taking concrete measures to create a society in which women shine. The policy continues to draw international attention, as my speech was warmly welcomed by many head of delegations at the forum in Bali.

First of all, I would like to speak about part of the outcome of the first year of the strategy.

Women's participation in the economy still remains a serious challenge in Japan. Therefore, Prime Minister Abe directly requested economic groups to appoint women to executive and managerial positions. As a result, there is an increasing tendency for women to be appointed to executive and managerial positions; the share of women increased from 6.9% in June, 2012 to 7.5% in June 2013.

And the employment rate of women ages 25 to 44 is improved; from 68% in 2012 to 69.5% in 2013.

In addition, we are taking certain steps so that women can easily participate in the economy, such as "Accelerating the elimination of childcare waiting lists," which enables all the parents to use childcare facilities, improvement of "Childcare Leave Benefits," and so on.

(Further actions toward creating a society in which women shine)

Furthermore, we are examining the policies for the evolution of the growth strategy, and will compile concrete actions to be included, especially "Encouraging companies to increase appointment of women in executive and managerial positions," "Creating work places and a society in which people can balance between a wealthy life and career," and other policies. The overall goal is to create a "Japan where women can shine" by the middle of this year. We will take these actions powerfully.

I wish that these actions and the outcome of the WOMENOMICS by Japan could be used as good practices for each economy in promoting the economic empowerment of women.

(Actions to be taken in APEC)

Now, I would like to make some suggestions as we push ourselves into accelerating actions on women and the economy in APEC.

Japan has taken several actions focused on improvement of women's leadership in the APEC region to further progress "The San Francisco Declaration."

For example, Japan hosted "APEC Leadership Forum on Women: Powerhouse for Economic Growth" in Yokohama in March 2012. Japan also suggested at this forum, held in Bali last year, to publicize the status of women in senior management position and leadership. We call it "VISUALIZATION" -- an action that should be taken by APEC economies, and the suggestion was adopted in the statement.

This year, we will conduct a survey titled "50 Leading Companies for Women in APEC" to support companies from APEC economies that have taken innovative and positive actions for facilitating women's active role and "visualising" them as an APEC project. For making the survey fruitfully, we would appreciate it if we can have positive cooperation with each economy, such as selecting companies that have taken innovative and positive actions for promotion of active participation by women.

In Japan, we have set the targets of increasing the share of women in leadership positions to at least 30% by 2020, for improving women's leadership. And many economies also have similar targets.

I recognize that participation of women in economic activities will serve as a catalyst to promote economic growth throughout the APEC region. Therefore, I propose that the APEC Women and the Economy Forum adopt the actions for increasing the share of women in leadership positions so that each economy can accelerate the actions.

In addition, education in the area of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) is considered to be an important key to promote employment and active participation for women, as well as a driving force toward economic growth in the APEC region. Against this background, we will start a study for taking stock of the current situation of STEM education for women, and analyze the expected effect on economies by promoting STEM education for women.

However, women's leadership is not only the core of economic growth. If you take a look at women in the disaster-affected areas caused by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake you will see many women who played an important role in rescue operations, in medical assistance and firefighting, as well as in restoration and reconstruction.

In March this year, Japan submitted a draft resolution on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in natural disasters, which call on countries to promote women's leadership, at the 58th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, and the resolution was adopted with the consensus of many countries.

There are many economies in the APEC region, which has suffered from earthquakes, typhoons, floods, and other natural disasters. Hence, we are considering a program in which economies can share good practices for promoting women's active participation in restoration and reconstruction from natural disasters with one another.

(As you can see from the pamphlet distributed on the table,) Japan has drawn up the guidelines on disaster prevention and reconstruction from a gender-equal perspective, based upon the experience of the Great East Japan Earthquake and other past natural disasters. I hope this will serve as a useful reference among economies.

(Closing)

In closing, next year will be the 20th commemoration of the Fourth World Conference on Women and “Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.” These documents are still regarded as international guidelines on the advancement of women.

Here we are in Beijing. It is meaningful that we are discussing actions and initiatives, and identifying situations and challenges to promote active participation by women, in the landmark city of the first memorable World Conference on Women in Asia.

I fully expect that the statements of this forum will lead each economy to take concrete actions to promote the economic empowerment of Women, under APEC Leaders’ Growth Strategy.

The Republic of the Philippines will host APEC next year.

We expect the Republic of the Philippines to continue its activities for “Women and the Economy” based upon the result of this forum. We will give our support as much as possible.

I would like to thank you all for listening so attentively.