

APEC Women and the Economy Forum Opening Speech
by Ms. Fumiko Hayashi, the Mayor of Yokohama
“Women and Innovative Economic Growth”
29th June 2012

Distinguished participants, good morning. I am Fumiko Hayashi, Mayor of Yokohama. I am grateful to be able to continue our discussions today to further improve the social advancement of women towards the revitalization of the economy. First, I would like to express my respect to the people of Russia who devoted themselves to hold this Women and the Economy Forum.

Saint Petersburg has much in common with Yokohama: ports and coastal scenery; beautiful historical streetscapes; and a diversity and openness acquired from exchanges through its port. I believe that cities like Saint Petersburg and Yokohama, where people gather from around the world, are truly ideal places for discussions on APEC’s Innovative Economic Growth.

The discussions at APEC thus far have made it clear that women have become a driving force for economic growth, but the road to this recognition has never been an easy one.

When I started working 47 years ago, women were mere assistants for men. Furthermore, women were naturally expected to quit their jobs when they reached marrying age. It is at such a time that I entered the car sales business, a male dominated field. In this field, I became a top sales person due to the “sensitivity” that women possess.

After getting promoted to corporate manager, I was able to revitalize our company by using my strength as a woman to be “receptive” and “empathetic” to the needs of each customer and employee. Through my experiences, I have personally witnessed corporate performance being improved by a woman in male dominant economic fields.

Nonetheless, the number of female corporate and administrative executives still remains small, and the current state of improvements to the environment for women cannot be viewed as sufficient.

We, here today, hold the common belief that the participation and coalition of women are necessary for both economic growth and prosperity. It is important to understand how we can make specific progress in each of our region based on the San Francisco Declaration. Let us all take a bold step forward onto the stage of positive action towards economic growth.

In Japan, a major obstacle for the social advancement of women is that current systems and service volumes are not sufficient for women to maintain a balance between their children and their career. In fact, the number of women in the Japanese labor force drastically decreases during their child bearing and rearing periods, creating an M-shaped graph in the participation ratio.

Although the childcare leave system has been gradually improving, the volume of

childcare centers was not able to accommodate the needs of all working mothers, creating a large number of children on waiting lists in urban areas. In 2010, the size of the list in Yokohama was approximately 1,500 children.

Upon taking office as Mayor in 2009, I declared to reduce the number of children waiting to “zero”. The response from the people around me was truly cold, with most government officials and politicians claiming that “such a goal could not be achieved”. In contrast, I received a great deal of support from women who were eager to work but desperately in need of childcare.

Alongside our efforts to increase the number of childcare centers, I have led the City of Yokohama towards implementing various other measures, including the allocation of consulting staff called “Nursery Concierge” to listen to the needs of working mothers. As a result, in April of this year, the number of children on the waiting list had decreased by 88% from when I took office, and I believe that we are well on our way to “zero” waiting child in the next year.

In addition, these measures have also had an impact on other municipalities and governments. I feel grateful that the efforts of Yokohama have contributed in this way to other similar endeavors.

Moreover, in 2011, the City of Yokohama began a special program to support female entrepreneurs. The program included the provision of shared office space, a special consulting team, and financing services with preferential interest rates.

Furthermore, in October of last year, we held a conference aimed at establishing a network for working women and their career advancement in Yokohama. With the number of participants exceeding our expectations, I fully realized that the issues identified in the San Francisco Declaration were also shared by women in Japan.

In March of this year, we hosted the APEC Leadership Forum on Women in Yokohama, the first conference to follow up on the progress of the San Francisco Declaration. The active discussions at the conference offered great impact and hope for the young working women of APEC members.

At the Forum, we deepened discussions on future APEC issues for women to exert their leadership. It solidified our aim to achieve new bonds towards economic growth through bringing to light new role models and mentors, and through the networking with other APEC economies.

I myself was truly encouraged by these discussions, and resolved anew to take further action to more specifically advance the participation of women in future economic growth and prosperity.

Immediately following the APEC Forum in Yokohama, the Government of Japan called for a meeting of the Council for Gender Equality. At the meeting, I offered my opinion to Prime Minister Noda, stating that now is the time for both public and private sectors to make a shift from mere discussions to positive action; recognizing the social advancement of women as an issue vital to economic recovery.

Shortly after the meeting, the Government took further positive action and upheld its strategies for the regeneration of Japan by advocating companies which feature women in more active roles and by directly requesting that companies further introduce women to corporate and executive positions.

Many Japanese companies are currently in the process of introducing such ideas into their own economic strategies, upholding their own specific targets and putting forth effort.

The San Francisco Declaration stated that without the full-fledged participation of women in both society and the economy, our regional economic activities cannot fully develop. The ideas which came to fruition in the Declaration are now steadily spreading throughout Japanese society.

What made me stand up as a candidate for Mayor of Yokohama was my wish for a society where women can fully exert their capabilities and participate in their own economy. Now, the time is ripe. Together with women's more active role will come further economic growth and richer civic life. I strongly hope that Yokohama will lead Japan and the world as a city where women's social advancement can produce such ideals.

In following with the discussions in San Francisco, I strongly expect that the Women and the Economy Forum here in Saint Petersburg will provide both encouragement and hope for all working women, especially for the younger generations of APEC economies. In leading the prosperity of the APEC member economies, let us use this opportunity to exhaustively discuss our issues, and set out productive proposals for the rest of the world.

Thank you very much.