

**APEC Women and the Economy Forum (WEF)**  
**High Level Policy Dialogue (HLPD)**  
**Statement of Mr. Ryosei Tanaka,**  
**Minister of State for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment**  
**September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018**

Thank you, Honorable Minister Soroi Eoe. I am honored to be here and to be given an opportunity to speak in front of distinguished representatives. I would also like to express my gratitude to Papua New Guinea for hosting this wonderful forum.

Before starting my speech, let me say a few words.

In this week, Japan was hit by an extremely strong typhoon and a very severe earthquake. The government of Japan is now working hard to rescue people, restore lifeline and so on. On behalf of Japan, I thank you to your word of sympathy and warm support extended.

Women and girls are vulnerable to disasters, but disaster management run by mostly only men cannot effectively respond to the various needs of women and child rearing. Not only food and blankets but also milk for babies and female sanitary items are necessary. We need to cope with privacy of women in shelters and gender based violence. Reconstruction require women's power and perspectives. The key is promoting gender equality usually in all areas including disaster management.

Japan learned from the experience of Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 and published documents on disaster management from gender perspective, including measurements for disaster prevention, restoration, and reconstruction. We will continue the efforts.

In Japan, women represent our greatest potential. Based on this conviction, Japan has taken measures to create an environment where women can make full use of their talents in accord with their wishes. It is particularly vital to ensure that a proper balance is maintained between work and home life, including childcare. However, in Japan, practice of long working hours among the child-raising generation makes achieving a work-life balance difficult, hinders women's efforts to build a career, and prevents men from

getting involved in home life.

The Abe cabinet regards reforming working styles as one of the biggest priorities, and is implementing numerous measures that involve both the government and private sectors.

In this June, a new legislation on work-style reforms was passed, including the introduction of legal upper limits on overtime hours, with penalties for infringements. Companies themselves are also taking measures to correct the long working hours. Furthermore, the new legislation puts “equal pay for equal work” into practice and contains the provisions to reduce the irrational gaps in the treatment between regular workers and non-regular workers. It’s hoped that this will help to improve conditions for women.

The same parliament session established another important law: the Act on Promotion of Gender Equality in the Political Field. The proportion of women among political representatives in Japan continues to be low: 10.1 percent in the House of Representatives, and 20.7 percent in the House of Councilors. This law provides that political parties are to endeavor to voluntarily work on, such as aiming to make the number of male and female candidates be as even as possible in national and local parliament elections.

Promoting women’s participation in digital economy is very significant. Digitalization and automation increases productivity, creates new business models, markets and employment, and brings massive economic and social opportunities. We will ensure that women can play a full role in the rapidly growing digital economy and become an engine driving the growth, and at the same time women can benefit from the fruits.

Technological breakthroughs including AI, IoT, and robotics are changing the way we live and work. It is important to grasp this change as the opportunity to bring about “gender inclusion and empowerment.” For example, utilizing ICT, telecommuting can help enable child-rearing parents to work at home. Advanced home electrical appliance can reduce the time spent on housework, and at the same time, make it easier for men to share it. ICT improves the access to capital to start-up and market.

Human resources in IT fields are essential to the fourth industrial revolution. It is estimated that Japan may have a deficit of as many as 800,000 IT workers by 2030. Women make up only 14 percent of IT technicians, as well as 17 percent of university students in STEM fields. In order to incorporate good ideas from different perspectives into science and technology fields and stimulate the innovation, it is essential to create an environment in which women can make the most of their abilities and talents. The government has set a target to increase the proportion of women among STEM students and researchers in the natural sciences, and is taking steps to make it easier for female researchers and engineers to continue in work. We have introduced measures involving collaboration among industry, academia, and the government to provide training to women in STEM careers and encourage more female students to choose major in STEM subjects. In this June, STEM Girls Ambassador were appointed as part of our efforts to attract more young women to STEM careers. Additionally, in 2020 programming education will become a compulsory subject in elementary schools, providing all girls and boys with an opportunity to study from an early age.

At the same time, it is said that around half of the jobs that exist today could be replaceable by artificial intelligence or robots in ten or twenty years. It is important that every individual should be able to choose a career suited to their lifestyle, and acquire the skills, and abilities required at each new stage.

To this end, we will drastically expand recurrent education. I believe that this is very important for encouraging greater involvement of women in the workforce, by supporting women returning to work after a prolonged absence for child-rearing, by helping them shift career to an IT or digital field, or by boosting their careers to become leaders.

Finally, achieving a gender-equal society where a woman or girl is never discriminated is an essential part of women's empowerment. In various areas of social and economic life in Japan, many men and women still feel that men receive better treatment. Getting rid of the difficulties that women face is an urgent task. These include women's health issues, unreasonable gaps in pay between men and women, the difficulties experienced by single mothers, as well as sexual harassment, violence against women, and other

intolerable infringements of women's basic human rights. We implement measures to remove the difficulties and encourage women to take a greater role in the economy, and we will build a fairer society.

Japan will continue to cooperate with APEC member economies, the private sector, civil society and international organizations in various fora including APEC and the UN. We will utilize every opportunity to share our best practices and take initiatives to promote women's empowerment and gender equality.

Thank you for your kind attention.