

APEC Women and the Economy Forum (WEF)
High Level Policy Dialogue on Women and the Economy
(HLPDWE) Session 1

Statement of Mr. Atsuhiko Beppu, Vice-Minister

**Current initiatives to address existing challenges for the integration of
women in the economy**

October 4th, 2019

Thank you, Your Excellency, Minister Isabel Plá. I am very grateful to speak at this High Level Policy Dialogue.

Japan has recognized that women's economic empowerment is essential to sustainable growth, and accelerated efforts under the strong political leadership and the collaboration of public and private sectors. I would like to explain four key important challenges and efforts

No.1 Promotion of Women

No.2 Expanding Childcare Facilities

No. 3 Changing men's mindset and behavior, and

No.4 Work-style Reform

First, promotion of women.

In 2013, Prime Minister Abe invited and directly requested to the tops of Japan's three major business associations, urging efforts to appoint female directors and boost women's participation in companies. The request was made in front of the media, and of course they answered "yes". This event changed the social recognition. In order to ensure effectiveness, Financial Service Agency soon made it mandatory for listed companies to disclose the percentage of women directors in their Annual Securities Reports.

In addition, the government in corporation with Tokyo Stock Exchange has emphasized diversity as an important factor in corporate governance, and promoting gender-lens investment. Government Pension Investment

Fund of Japan, which is one of the biggest in the world, incorporated Women Index in its portfolio.

The proportion of female directors at listed companies is now 3.4 times higher than it was seven years ago.

In order to consolidate the movement, Japan enacted the Women's Empowerment Act in 2015. This act obliges private companies, national government agencies, and local governments to develop action plans to promote women's participation and advancement, and to publish information on this matters. Information is disclosed on a government website and widely publicized to encourage voluntary efforts.

Currently, private companies with more than 300 full-time employees are obliged under this law. In this May, the law was amended to lower the threshold to more than 100 full-time employees. As a result, the number of obliged companies will triple to 48,000 companies.

Second, childcare facilities play an important role in enhancing women's empowerment. In Japan, many women had to give up continued employment due to a shortage of children daycare centers. Solving this problem has been a matter of urgency. Government accelerated the effort since 2013 and made additional childcare place for 660 thousand children in 6 years.

In the past, 60% of working women quit their jobs when they gave birth to first children, but in the latest survey, the proportion fell to below 50%. Expansion of childcare centers is not only a social welfare policy but also an important investment for the future.

Third, changing men's mindset and behaviors is crucial.

In 2014, nine male executives gathered to formulate and publish a "Declaration on Action" to create "a society in which women shine." This

initiative has now expanded into a network of more than 230 leaders, including the top of Japan Branch of Johnson and Johnson and some governors and mayors. Government is fostering their peer-learning and competition for better practices. Their actions are influential and spreading.

In addition to this top-down approach, Japan promotes a bottom-up approach. Equality should start at home. Men's participation in and co-responsibility of childcare and housework is vital. Government is promoting campaigns in order to disseminate the perception of importance and enjoyment of childcare, using a somewhat cool catch-phrase "Ikumen."

Forth and Lastly, Work Style Reform, which enables women and men to reconcile work with family life.

The Abe administration has positioned work style reform as one of the top priorities. The Work Style Reform Act was enacted last June, which introduced upper limits on overtime and penalties for non-compliance.

In this 6 years, employment rate of women aged between 25 and 44 rapidly increased from 68% to 77%, and women in employment increased by about 3 million, although the population is gradually declining. Definitely "womenomics" is driving the growth of Japan's economy. The term "women's economic empowerment" has also permeated throughout Japanese society.

The society in which women can thrive is also a society where men can enjoy working and living. It is a society of high productivity and brings economic vitalization.

Japan is committed to further accelerating our efforts for gender equality and women's empowerment.

Thank you.