

Statement by
Minister of State for Gender Equality and Social Affairs of Japan
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at Session One of the
East Asia Gender Equality Ministerial Meeting
“Progress of Gender Mainstreaming in Each Country and Problems to be Solved”
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Honorable Ministerial Colleagues,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Introduction

I am pleased to share with you a brief overview of the progress Japan is making in the efforts of promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women. We, the Government of Japan, take gender issues seriously with a tremendous sense of urgency—we are already facing the dual issues of declining population and aging-society. Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi fully understands the crucial role women have to play in society. Indeed, my own position as Minister is testament to Prime Minister Koizumi’s dedication to gender equality issues—in October last year I was appointed as Minister of State for Gender Equality and Social Affairs, the first ministerial post to deal exclusively with these issues.

Over the course of the sixty years of the post-war period Japan has achieved great success in terms of economic development. In addition to economic achievements however, we are now being called upon to redouble our efforts to promote social policy. Social policy is an integral part of democratic development, and gender equality lies at the very heart of social policy as a tool to enhance and promote democratization.

Japan has been promoting gender equality vigorously: We have undertaken concrete measures to create a fair society for both men and women. In my own work place—political sphere - there are now more women ever serving as Members of the House of Representatives in the National Diet than at any other time in Japan’s history. Although women’s participation in society has increased over the years, particularly in the decision-making process, more needs to be done. It is essential that women be empowered to contribute their full potential to society and the economy – that is the only way to ensure sustainability in social development and economic growth.

Strengthening the National Machinery

In 2001, throughout the course of the reorganization of central government ministries, I was vocal in pointing out the vital importance of gender equality. I worked hard as a member of the Headquarters for Administrative Reform to strengthen the national gender machinery. The efforts made by my colleagues and myself led to the establishment of the Council for Gender Equality. This Council is headed by the Chief Cabinet Secretary and comprises ministers and experts from the private sector.

The *modus operandi* of the Council is to monitor the implementation of government policies concerning gender equality and to conduct analytical research on the impact of such policies. I suggested very strongly that the function of the Council be strengthened. As a result, the Council has come to play a central role in gender mainstreaming, particularly in ensuring the effective implementation of the gender-related policies.

The Council is supported by the Gender Equality Bureau in the Cabinet Office, which is tasked with overall planning and coordination of gender equality policies in the government as a whole. The Council and the Bureau form a unique and dynamic governmental entity for promoting gender mainstreaming.

Formulation of the Second Basic Plan for Gender Equality

In 1999, the Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society was enacted with unanimous approval of government. On the basis of this new Law, the Basic Plan for Gender Equality was formulated. These policy tools have been used to promote gender equality measures in a comprehensive and systematic way.

At the end of 2005, the revised Basic Plan for Gender Equality was approved by the Cabinet. The revised Plan sets out a number of specific targets, for example for women to fill 30% of the leadership positions in all spheres of society by the year 2020. It also aims to mainstream gender in such areas as science and technology and disaster reduction.

I, too, engaged myself in accelerating progress at the grass-roots level: I visited 10 local sites throughout Japan and organized what we call the “Hands-on Workshop by Minister on Gender Equality.”

I am also pleased to inform you that the 30% target has already been met as far as governmental committees and councils are concerned, 14 years ahead of the target date. Drawing on this excellent result, we have decided to set a new goal for promoting good gender balance in governmental committees and councils – we are aiming that by 2020 at least 40 % of the membership positions should be occupied by women. In other words, we aim for achieving the 6:4 gender balance in governmental committees and councils.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to point out that gender equality is not only a goal on its own right, but it cuts across all other significant challenges Japan is faced with, including a rapidly declining birthrate.

For the reasons I mentioned earlier, the Government of Japan is engaged in earnest efforts to improve the status of women and to promote gender equality – both in Japan as well as in the context of international cooperation. We would like to further strengthen our efforts for gender equality and the empowerment of women in partnership with other countries, international organizations, and the civil society, including NGOs.

When I took my office last year, I identified the establishment of a regional dialogue process as one of the priorities I wished to pursue during my tenure. Promotion of gender equality is a common objective in East Asia and this challenge is best responded through strategic partnerships. That is why I am excited to be hosting this Meeting to provide a regional platform for partnerships – a tangible contribution I was able to make as Minister for Gender Equality and Social Affairs.

I will continue to devote myself in the efforts of achieving gender equality – both in Japan and overseas. I hope that you will join me in that endeavor.