

**Ministerial Address by
Minister for Gender Equality and Social Affairs of Japan
H.E. Ms. Yoko Kamikawa
at the Second East Asia Gender Equality Ministerial Meeting**

Madam Chair,
Honorable Ministerial Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Introduction

On behalf of the government of Japan I would like to begin by expressing my appreciation to Madam Chair, the government of India and all other persons involved, who have worked so hard to convene this Second East Asia Gender Equality Ministerial Meeting.

The first ever East Asia Gender Equality Ministerial Meeting was held in Tokyo in June last year. At that meeting it was the gracious indication of Madam Chair, Minister Chowdhury, that India would be prepared to host the second meeting, which provided impetus to our discussions in Tokyo. As a result of our discussions last year we ultimately concluded to make the meeting an annual event, with India and the Republic of Korea confirmed as the hosts of the second and the third meetings respectively. I would like to take this opportunity to express my respect for the proactive leadership demonstrated by Minister Chowdhury, and reiterate my appreciation for the hosting of this second meeting.

I was appointed to the post of Minister for Gender Equality and Social Affairs only recently in August, but as the representative of the host country of the first meeting and in my position as gender equality minister, I am truly delighted that we have all been able to gather for the second time.

As the Chair of the first meeting, Japan was requested by ministerial colleagues to convey the results of the meeting to the international community, including to the United Nations (UN). Former Minister Kuniko Inoguchi, who served as chairperson last year, visited UN headquarters in New York in July last year. During her visit she handed the Tokyo Joint Ministerial Communiqué to Ms. Alicia Bárcena Ibarra, Chef de Cabinet of the UN. Ms. Bárcena indicated that she thought the outcomes of the Ministerial Meeting to be excellent and also expressed her appreciation for delivering the details of the meeting to the UN.

Challenges for Gender Equality in Japan, Recent Approaches and Future Directions

The government of Japan recognizes that the realization of a gender equal society in which all people, regardless of gender, can participate and be empowered to work to their full potential is an issue of the highest priority that will decide our country's future course in the 21st century.

Based on this fundamental recognition, the government has been implementing a range of comprehensive and systemized policies in accordance with the stipulations of the Basic Law for a Gender-equal Society and the Basic Plans for Gender Equality. The Second Basic Plan was formulated in 2005, and it provides a template for comprehensive action running through to 2010.

Today I would like to talk about the developments that have occurred in Japan in the promotion of gender equality. I will make four points.

(Promotion of women's participation and leadership)

Firstly, in terms of women's participation in decision-making processes, Japan has yet to attain a status that could be referred to as satisfactory. The proportion of women parliamentarians stands at around 9% of the total, and the proportion of women serving as public officials in managerial positions is around 1.8%. It is for such reasons that in the Second Basic Plan for Gender Equality, the goal was set of ensuring that by 2020 the proportion of women taking a leadership role in all areas of society should stand at around 30%.

A variety of approaches are being implemented towards the achievement of this goal.

(Elimination of violence against women)

My second point concerns the elimination of violence against women.

Violence against women, including spousal violence, sexual crimes, prostitution and trafficking in persons, sexual harassment and acts of stalking is a grave and unacceptable violation of the human rights of women. The government of Japan recognizes the elimination of violence against women to be an issue that must be dealt with and overcome as a matter of the highest priority in the course of the formation of a gender equal society. We are promoting a comprehensive set of measures that are designed to crack down on the various types of violence against women that exist.

In July this year the Law for the Prevention of Spousal Violence and the Protection of Victims was revised and strengthened to enhance the system for protection of victims, and bolster regulations concerning the role of local governments in victims' vicinity.

(Promoting work-life balance)

My third point is regarding work-life balance. In Japan it is currently the case that even if people seek to achieve a balance in the work or home life, they are usually compelled to choose either one or the other.

Approximately 70% of all working women leave their work at the birth of their first child, regardless of whether they actually wish to continue working. Also it is often the case that many

of these women who put their careers on hold cannot find reemployment that is in line with their expectations, and many choose to return to the workforce as part-time workers, receiving significantly less salary than full-time regular workers. Another factor causing difficulty in balancing work and home life is long working hours. In particular, men in their 30s, many of them being fathers, work long hours, and this in effect prevents them from taking part in house work, child-rearing or caring for the elderly, even if they desire to do so.

To tackle this issue, the government has decided to formulate a Charter and Action Guidelines to promote Work-Life Balance, and the documents should be finalized by the end of this month. Our intention is for the Charter and the Action Guidelines to be taken up by the public and private sectors in substantial and proactive measures to promote work-life balance. We aim to achieve a revolution in societal structures to ensure the emergence of a Work-Life Balance society that is full of diversity and potential.

(Development of legislation on employment)

Lastly, I would like to report on revisions of legislation concerning employment that have been enacted.

In Japan, the long-term economic stagnation and the intensified competition at home and abroad have caused an increase in the number of non-regular workers including part-time workers. A rise in numbers of non-regular workers has been particularly noticeable among women, and over a half of all female workers, in fact, now work as non-regular workers. In terms of wages, when the salary level of full-time male workers is set at 100, in 2006 the salary level of male part-time workers stands at 53, and that for female part-time workers is only 47.

It was for such reasons that the Part-Time Work Law was revised this year. The revised law obliges employers to ensure equitable treatment between full- and part-time workers and to establish measures to encourage part-timers to make a transition to becoming full-time workers.

In addition, the Equal Employment Opportunity Law was revised last year, and now explicitly prohibits indirect forms of discrimination, whereby employers deliberately set conditions that are difficult for women to meet, in an attempt to avoid hiring and promoting women workers.

Conclusion

Madam Chair,

Strong political will and leadership are essential for the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women.

The current Prime Minister of Japan Yasuo Fukuda was the Minister responsible for gender

equality at the time that the original Basic Plan was formulated in 2000. In his recent policy speech to the Diet, the Prime Minister stated, “we will work to realize a “gender-equal society,” in which all individuals, men and women alike, can share happiness and responsibilities, and fully harness their personalities and abilities.”

With the full backing of the Prime Minister and the rest of the Cabinet, my intention is to further accelerate efforts towards the realization of a gender-equal society.

Under the guidance of Madam Chair, and with the dynamic leadership of all gathered at the table today, I believe the meeting will be deeply meaningful and fruitful.

I close with the wish for the success of this Ministerial Meeting.

Thank you.