

**Opening Statement by the Head of Delegation
for the Ninth Periodic Report of the Government of Japan**

[Introduction]

We are sincerely grateful to the members of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women for gathering here today to review the ninth periodic report of the Government of Japan. We would like to pay tribute to the Committee for its constant and tireless work to eliminate discrimination against women worldwide.

It is a great source of pride for Japan that Hiroko Akizuki is serving as the vice chair of the Committee. And we would also like to express our heartfelt thanks to the representatives of civil society who have traveled from Japan for the enormous contributions they make on an ongoing basis.

For nearly 40 years since ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1985, Japan has committed itself to implementing gender equality measures with the aim of eliminating discrimination against women both in its legislation and in actual practice. We are committed to working in partnership with the Committee to make further progress toward eliminating all forms of discrimination against women and realizing a gender-equal society as soon as possible.

[Administrative Structure for Promoting Gender Equality]

First, I would like to provide an overview of the Government of Japan's administration for gender equality.

Gender equality is a cross-cutting issue that relates to almost all policy areas. In addressing this issue, the Government of Japan has established a structure that involves all its ministries in promoting gender equality. Each ministry is responsible for addressing specific issues such as violence against women, employment-related discrimination, and women's participation in policymaking and planning processes. In parallel, the responsibilities of the Cabinet Office include overall coordination to ensure consistency among the individual ministries' policies, and preparation and implementation of the Basic Plans for Gender Equality.

Within the Cabinet Office, the Council for Gender Equality, made up of relevant ministers and experts, discusses the Basic Plans for Gender Equality. The Council also conducts research, deliberates on gender-related matters, monitors progress in implementing policies on gender, including those in the Basic Plans, and engages in other related activities. Within the Cabinet, the Headquarters for the Promotion of Gender Equality, and the Headquarters for Creating a Society in Which All Women Shine, both of which are made up of all ministers of state, including the prime minister, formulate an annual package of specific policies aimed at achieving the objectives of the Basic Plan. This policy package is called the Intensive Policy for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

I would also like to share that we are considering measures to reinforce the national machinery for gender equality. This involves transferring the responsibility for the National Women's Education Center from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology to the Cabinet Office, which has the key function of promoting gender equality. We expect this to enhance the Center's capabilities as a new core organization for women's empowerment.

[Progress on the Previous Concluding Observations' Follow-up Requests]

Next, I would like to address the recommendations made by the Committee in its concluding observations on the combined seventh and eighth periodic reports of Japan, particularly those requiring follow-up and provide an update on progress since the ninth periodic report.

In its recommendation in paragraph 13 (a), one of the issues the Committee raised was the gap in the legal minimum age of marriage between women and men. As the Government of Japan reported in its previous response to the Committee's concluding observations, a bill to revise the Civil Code was submitted to the National Diet. I am pleased to inform you that this bill was enacted in June 2018 and took effect in April 2022.

Another issue raised was the waiting period for women to remarry upon divorce. The Government of Japan noted in the ninth periodic report that it needed to give consideration to the matter, and in December 2022 the National Diet subsequently enacted a revision to the Civil Code, which included the abolition of the waiting period for women to remarry upon divorce. This revision then entered into force in April 2024.

On the issue of a system of surnames for married couples allowing both a husband and

wife to adopt separate surnames, public opinion in Japan varies greatly. Some argue that—in a context where the large majority of women now continue working after getting married—the inability to continue using their former surnames makes life difficult. Meanwhile, others argue that, if members of a family share the same surname, this creates a sense of solidarity for both the couple and the family as a whole, which is in the best interests of any children in the family. The Government of Japan regards the introduction of a system that allows married couples to use separate surnames as an important issue connected to how the family is generally perceived in Japanese society, and believes that it is necessary to gain broad-based public understanding in this regard. In line with this thinking, the Fifth Basic Plan for Gender Equality states that the government will proceed with deliberations on the introduction of such a system while closely monitoring public opinion at all levels of society and developments in the National Diet’s discussion on the matter, and while also taking judicial rulings into account.

At the same time, the government has been committed to expanding the use of former surnames as a matter of convenience, so that people who changed their surnames as a result of marriage are not inconvenienced or placed at a disadvantage. So far, we have made it possible to record former surnames alongside formal surnames on official documents, including “My Number” identification cards, passports, and applications for property registrations. Additionally, we have been working on raising awareness of this fact through conducting multiple initiatives, such as posting updates on current progress in the use of former surnames in national qualifications or licenses on the Cabinet Office’s website.

With regard to the Committee’s recommendations in paragraph 21 (d) and (e), we recognize that women may encounter multiple and intersecting difficulties due to factors such as being foreigners, having foreign roots, being from Ainu, or Buraku discrimination. These difficulties often stem from stereotyped perceptions about gender roles and gender-based bias. Having acknowledged this context, under the Fifth Basic Plan we are working on policies in line with the Hate Speech Elimination Act, the Act on the Promotion of the Elimination of Buraku Discrimination, and the Act on Promoting Measures for the Ainu People, all of which incorporate the principle that discrimination is unacceptable. In addition, our Basic Plan on Human Rights Education and Human Rights Awareness-Raising targets the comprehensive and systematic promotion of human rights education and awareness-raising. It identifies issues concerning women, the Buraku discrimination, the Ainu people, and foreign nationals as human rights issues. The plan promotes various forms of human rights education and awareness-raising activities.

I would like to add that we are currently reviewing the content of this Basic Plan on Human Rights Education and Human Rights Awareness-Raising. Our aim is to enable the provision of effective human rights education and promotion of awareness-raising activities that appropriately address both existing and emergent human rights issues, taking into account the changing social climate and the direction of international trends.

Now, we will outline Japan's progress in eliminating discrimination against women since the ninth periodic report.

[Violence against Women]

First, I would like to share some significant progress that we have made in eradicating violence against women.

As described in the ninth periodic report, Japan addressed the recommendations in paragraph 23 (a), (b), and (c) through revisions to the Penal Code in 2017. These revisions expanded the definition of the crime of rape, changed the terminology of the crime to "forcible sexual intercourse," raised the minimum statutory penalty for the crime, established the new offenses of custodial indecency and custodial sexual intercourse, and made sexual crimes prosecutable even without an accusation by a victim.

In today's report, we would like to highlight further revisions to Japan's Penal Code. In revisions made in 2023, the term "forcible sexual intercourse" was changed to "penetrative sexual assault" and "indecency through compulsion" was changed to "indecent assault," while the criteria defining these crimes were clarified. And we would like to emphasize that the text of the Penal Code now states clearly that these acts constitute crimes *regardless of whether the two parties are married or not*. In addition, the amendments made three further changes: (1) the age of sexual consent was raised from 13 to 16; (2) it became a crime to request or engage in a meeting with a child aged 15 or under for the purpose of an indecent act; and (3) the statute of limitations for prosecuting sexual crimes was extended.

What is more, in just the last three years, Japan has enacted multiple new laws, demonstrating the steady efforts of the government to eradicate sexual violence. These include an act establishing a new crime of Non-consensual Recording of a Sexual Image, an act to prevent harm as a result of performing in sexually explicit videos, and an act stipulating measures to prevent sexual violence against children to be taken by entities

such as those establishing schools and private-sector education or childcare providers. The third act that I just mentioned includes a mechanism for these entities to check whether employees have any history of committing sexual crimes.

Progress has also been made in preventing intimate partner violence. As I just mentioned, the Penal Code now clarifies that non-consensual sexual intercourse or indecency between spouses also constitute crimes. In addition, the revision of related legislation in 2023 enable courts to issue stay-away orders banning spouses from approaching victims not only in cases of physical violence, but also in cases of non-physical acts causing psychological harm. We are currently working to inform the general public that such protection orders can also be applied in cases of violence between same-sex partners.

I would also like to emphasize that the Government of Japan's efforts are not limited to legislation; we have also been implementing policies to eradicate violence against women and gender-based violence. For example, in the annual policy package, which is decided jointly by the two Headquarter organizations made up of all Cabinet ministers, we update measures to combat sexual crimes and sexual violence, as well as intimate partner violence, stalking, and sexual harassment, and the relevant ministries implement the associated initiatives.

We are also enhancing support for the victims of such forms of violence. In this regard, in 2022, Japan enacted a new law that provides a legislative basis for Japan's victim support framework. This new law stipulates the comprehensive provision of a wide range of assistance to enable women facing difficult problems, including victims of violence, to receive the most appropriate support. This includes identifying such women, offering them counselling, and providing them with help in recovering physically and psychologically and living independently.

With regard to the recommendations in paragraph 25, our ninth periodic report stated that, in accordance with the 2019 Act on the Payment of Lump-Sum Compensation to People who Underwent Eugenic Surgeries, a lump-sum payment of 3.2 million yen was provided to people with disabilities who underwent forced surgeries or other sterilization procedures. We subsequently continued to work on this issue, and as of 31 August 2024, a cumulative total of 1,129 claimants (including 817 women) had been approved for receipt of such payments. Furthermore, in July 2024, the Supreme Court of Japan ruled that the provisions of the now-defunct Eugenic Protection Act relating to sterilization surgeries were unconstitutional. This ruling came in response to litigation against the

Japanese state by, among others, people who had undergone sterilization surgery in accordance with the Eugenic Protection Act, and were claiming remedies, including compensation for damages pursuant to the State Redress Act. In light of this ruling, at a meeting with plaintiffs and others, the prime minister apologized on behalf of the government for its role in enforcing the Eugenic Protection Act. Furthermore, on 30 September 2024, a “Basic Agreement” was signed with the group of plaintiffs, defense lawyers, and supporting organizations, aiming for a comprehensive solution to the issues of the now-defunct Eugenic Protection Act. Under this agreement, the Government of Japan plans to hold continuous and regular consultation meetings for the realization of permanent measures and other measures. Furthermore, as a result of discussions at a non-partisan alliance of National Diet members on a new mechanism for compensation in relation to the now-defunct Eugenic Protection Act, the Diet passed and enacted the Bill on Payment of Compensation, etc. to Persons who Underwent Eugenic Surgery, etc. Under the Now-defunct Eugenic Protection Law, on 8 October 2024. The Government of Japan will steadily provide compensation and other payments, fully taking into account the background and purpose of the enactment of this bill.

As for the recommendations in paragraph 27, Japan’s National Diet approved the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its supplementary protocol on trafficking in persons in 2005. In 2017, Japan subsequently concluded the Convention and its supplementary protocol with the enactment and enforcement of domestic legislation, which was a prerequisite for their conclusion.

[Participation in Political and Public Life]

Next, I would like to report on progress regarding participation in political and public life. In paragraph 31 (a), (b), and (c) of its previous consideration of our reports, the Committee called upon Japan to take action to promote women’s participation in leading positions. We have already reported some of the progress in our ninth periodic report, but I wish to point out that in June 2021 the Act on Promotion of Gender Equality in the Political Field was revised. This revision not only specified the relevant institutions responsible for promoting gender equality in politics, but also encouraged political organizations, such as political parties, to take proactive measures. Additionally, it strengthened the obligations of the national and local governments. For instance, new mandatory policies were added in the form of measures to combat issues such as sexual harassment and harassment related to pregnancy and childbirth. In accordance with the aims of the Act, the Government of Japan is working to increase the proportion of women among political candidates. As it does so, the government is keeping in mind its own

aspirational target of increasing the percentage of women among candidates for the House of Representatives and the House of Councilors to 35% by 2025 in line with the Fifth Basic Plan. Furthermore, the government conducts surveys to assess political parties' progress in implementing the voluntary measures as a means of monitoring whether individual political parties have taken steps, such as setting targets, to increase the percentage of women among their candidates.

In addition to political participation, we are implementing a range of initiatives aimed at increasing women's participation in public life, including the executive and judicial spheres. For example, the Act on Promotion of Women's Participation and Advancement in the Workplace makes it obligatory for the national and local governments to identify and analyze the extent to which women are participating in their various agencies. Based on these analyses, they are required to set targets, formulate action plans comprising measures to achieve their targets and make information about women's participation publicly available. Furthermore, we are committed to making this information accessible for everybody by setting up a website that ensures it is clearly presented and searchable. Through these comprehensive initiatives, we are making steady progress, toward achieving the Fifth Basic Plan's numerical targets on women's participation in the executive and judicial spheres.

[Marriage and Family Relations]

Next, I would like to report on our progress regarding marriage and family matters. In paragraph 49 (a), (b), and (c) of the Committee's previous consideration of our reports, we received recommendations on marriage and family matters, including property distribution between husbands and wives, custody, child support, and the payment of financial child support. In our ninth periodic report we stated that revisions to the relevant laws have established a new procedure enabling divorced individuals to obtain information from a third party about the property of a former spouse who is their debtor. This change has improved the viability of judicially enforcing payment from a debtor's property in cases where child support payments are in arrears.

Since then, recognizing the importance of enabling all single-parent households that wish to receive child support, we set and announced the government target in April 2023. Our target, to be achieved by 2031, is twofold: one aspect is reception of child support by 40% of single-parent households, regardless of whether they have a child support agreement or not; and the other aspect is reception of child support by 70% of single-parent households that have a child support agreement.

Furthermore, revisions to the Civil Code in May 2024 introduced a statutory child support system that enables the parent who lives with a child to claim a prescribed amount of child support from the parent who lives separately, even if there is no agreement between the parents. The revisions also extended the procedures available for gathering information to facilitate the calculation of child support payments or distribution of property. In addition, the revisions protected the interests of children facing parental divorce or separation by clarifying the obligations of the father and mother with regard to child support, and by updating the Civil Code's provisions relating to parental responsibility and custody. As a result, it became possible for both the parents to be designated as the person having parental responsibility following divorce. With regard to this revision, to address concerns about potential child abuse or domestic violence, it was confirmed on multiple occasions in the National Diet that sole parental responsibility would always be mandated in potential cases of child abuse, domestic violence, or other potential harm.

[Employment]

Finally, I would like to report on our progress regarding employment. First, to address the Committee's recommendations in paragraph 35 (a), we revised the system prescribed in the Act on Promotion of Women's Participation and Advancement in the Workplace, making it obligatory for employers with 301 or more regularly employed workers to make information about the gender wage gap publicly available. We hope that this will prompt companies to analyze the causes of these gender gaps as a means of examining women's active engagement in their business, and ultimately to take action to reduce such wage gaps. In this connection, the government's efforts to support companies include offering a consultation service to help individual companies analyze the factors contributing to wage gaps between men and women and reduce those gaps, as well as promoting the use of digital tools to help companies calculate and analyze their gender wage gaps.

In addition, it became obligatory also for the national and local governments to make publicly available information on gender wage gaps for all their agencies pursuant to the above Act. The Cabinet Office follows up on the information disclosed and aims to enhance transparency through the development of a website that ensures clear presentation and searchability.

In connection with the recommendations in paragraph 35 (b), the Act on Childcare and Family Care Leave was revised in June 2021, creating a parental leave system that allows

fathers to take leave twice, up to a maximum total of four weeks, within the first eight weeks after the birth of their child. This is separate from the standard childcare leave that can generally be taken until the child turns one. The revisions in June 2021 also made it obligatory for employers with more than 1,000 regularly employed workers to make publicly available the rates of uptake for childcare leave among their male and female workers, but in June 2024 the Act was revised again and the obligation to make uptake rates publicly available was expanded to all employers with more than 300 regularly employed workers. In addition, employers are obliged to address the needs of workers parenting preschool children aged three or over by determining requirements within the workplace, then taking steps to establish flexible ways of working, such as telecommuting or shortened work hours, and giving workers the choice to avail of such options if they wish. The Employment Insurance Act was also revised in June 2024, amending the provision on childcare leave benefits, which usually covered 67% of pre-leave pay for the first 180 days following a child's birth, and 50% of pre-leave pay thereafter. Under the new provision, in a case where an employee is one of two parents who both take childcare leave for 14 days or more within a specific period immediately following a child's birth, that employee receives 80% of their pre-leave pay for 28 days. This payment is non-taxable, and employees are exempted from paying social insurance premiums while they are taking childcare leave, so employees can achieve a level of pay equivalent to their full pre-leave pay for up to 28 days.

[Conclusion]

This concludes my explanation of how we have been taking action in response to the Committee's last set of recommendations for Japan, as well as its general recommendations, by implementing a range of initiatives aimed at completely eliminating discrimination against women and establishing a gender-equal society. Madam Chair, before making my final remarks, I would first like to hand over to Ambassador Oike, our Permanent Representative in Geneva, who will provide you with some up-to-date information on Japan's initiatives to further the Women Peace and Security Agenda.

[Ambassador Oike]

Madam Chair, I am honored to introduce Japan's recent efforts in promoting the perspective of Women, Peace and Security, or WPS, as a major pillar of our foreign policy that is aligned with the principles of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Japan has successfully formulated three National Action Plans on WPS and is eagerly ensuring cross-cutting intergovernmental coordination, including through the establishment of the WPS Taskforce in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the

Headquarters for WPS Promotion in the Ministry of Defense. Internationally too, we are currently implementing 57 projects across the globe, contributing to promoting the WPS Agenda in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. As a sign of our commitment to making continuous efforts to promote women's participation and leadership, thus contributing to a peaceful and stable international community, I am very pleased to inform you that in 2025—which marks the 25th anniversary of the WPS agenda— Japan will assume the role of co-chair of the WPS Focal Points Network, which is the largest global network for WPS. In taking on the great responsibility that comes with this role, we will make every effort to advance the WPS Agenda internationally.

Thank you, and with that I would like to hand back to our Head of Delegation for her final remarks.

[Head of Delegation]

Japan's commitment to further the WPS Agenda as explained by Ambassador Oike just now is an important aspect of our actions to eliminate discrimination against women.

Turning again to our efforts as a whole, we are proud of what we have achieved so far, but at the same time we also recognize that many issues still need to be resolved. For example, in our public opinion survey on gender equality, the results regarding the public's perception of gender equality in society show that we have yet to overcome many challenges. We believe that these results reflect stereotyped gender roles, as well as gender-based bias and stereotypes, and unconscious bias, that have formed in people's minds over many years. Such ideas cannot be done away with overnight, but we will continue to strive to eliminate them.

We are grateful for this opportunity to hear the Committee members' opinions, and the Government of Japan is ready to respond in good faith to your questions. I would like to reiterate our appreciation to the Committee members and representatives of civil society who have come here today. Your continued support in pursuing our shared goal of eliminating all forms of discrimination against women is a significant source of encouragement for us.

Thank you.