

ADDRESS BY H.E. MR. MASAHIRO IMAMURA,  
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AT THE HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT  
OF THE SUBSTANTIVE SESSION  
OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

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Mr. President,

It is my great pleasure to speak today as the representative of the Japanese Government on the issue of human resources development. I sincerely hope that we will have very fruitful discussions under your leadership.

Mr. President,

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Nation- building is based on human resources development. Each nation needs to nurture its human resources according to its situation. Nations rich in natural resources need to strengthen the capacity of their people in order to effectively utilize those resources. And nations without such resources, like Japan, need to do so in order to find other means of economic growth. In today's world capital and technology move throughout the world freely and instantly in the search for profitable investment opportunities. Progress in development under each country's ownership can be made only if the human resources for receiving, digesting and developing capital and technology are solidly developed. I would say that nation- building cannot be realized without human resources development. Therefore, I believe it is extremely timely and appropriate to discuss at this high-level segment the theme of how human resources development contributes to the process of development.

Mr. President,

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Ever since the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Japan has consistently attached great importance to education and health in the process of modernization and development. In the belief that human resources are especially vital for the development and prosperity of countries that lack natural resources, Japan focused on basic education in the early stages of its national development and made primary education compulsory. Nation-wide compulsory education was realized at a relatively early stage of our development because Japan already had a local education system of “temple schools” for its citizens. The policy of emphasizing education has been passed along through succeeding generations up to the present. Prime Minister Koizumi also stresses the importance of education on every occasion, often citing the following anecdote. In the early years of the Meiji era, the Nagaoka region was devastated after a civil war and its people were suffering from severe poverty and food shortages. The Nagaoka region received a hundred sacks of rice in assistance. The leader of the region thought: “If we consume all the rice immediately by sharing with everyone, it will last for a few days. If we sell this rice to build a school and educate people, these one hundred sacks of rice will be returned as tens of thousands of sacks of rice in the future.” This rice was in fact used to establish a fund to build a school.

In the area of health,

In the area of health, Japan made efforts before World War II not only to increase the number of doctors, but also introduced the public health nurse system. Under this system, the government made efforts to post public health nurses in every city and village all over Japan. These nurses played a central role in disseminating knowledge of preventive medicine in communities, schools, companies and factories. Japan also introduced the maternity health record book system so that every mother is able to always attend to the health of her children.

Today, I would like to emphasize the mutually reinforcing effects of education and health. Japan introduced a nation-wide school meal system immediately after World War II. When there were food shortages, under this system all students, including those who did not have enough food at home, could attend school and focus on their studies without worrying about lunch. The school meal system also contributed to greatly improving the nutrition of students. In elementary schools, students are instructed to wash their hands and to gargle after they play outside or before they have lunch. Students also receive vaccinations in school. Getting into the habit of washing hands contributes not only to the prevention of disease and improvement of health, but also to raising the awareness of hygiene.

Efforts that the Japanese Government

Efforts that the Japanese Government has made in the area of education and health have fostered healthy Japanese who sustained Japan's rapid economic growth after World War II. Initially, those efforts do not necessarily require a huge budget and vast amounts of capital. Every country is expected to take creative initiatives for human resources development according to its domestic circumstances. This is the ownership that Japan repeatedly emphasizes, and we stand ready to support those countries that take such initiatives.

Mr. President,

Japan has been playing a positive role in international co-operation to combat infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS. In this regard, at the G8 Kyushu-Okinawa Summit in July 2000, Japan announced a three-billion-dollar support program over five years and since then has been steadily implementing this initiative, having allocated one billion dollars thus far to concrete assistance programs. Japan also pledged 200 million dollars to the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and plays a central role in the management of the Fund by serving as vice-chairman of its Board.

Now, over 880 million people

Now, more than 880 million people in the world are illiterate, and over 120 million children have no opportunity to receive a basic education. Because education is the basis of human development and nation-building, giving all boys and girls a basic education is a task of vital importance.

This is the reason Japan puts an emphasis on basic education, as clearly demonstrated by the fact that with our support in the five years from 1997 to 2001 about 1.1 million children in developing countries were provided the opportunity to go to school. Japan bears well over forty percent of the total cost of the “back to school” campaign of UNICEF in Afghanistan.

Japan has just announced the new “Basic Education for Growth Initiative” which will provide two billion dollars in aid over a five-year period beginning this year to support basic education in developing countries.

Mr. President,

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The work of the Council is not meant to duplicate or compete with the activities of the other UN organs, but rather to provide orientation and leadership and to co-ordinate the activities among the UN agencies and institutions. At the high-level segment this year, the Council is highlighting the issue of human resources development, with a special focus on health and education, and has taken an across the board approach to address economic and social challenges. I strongly support this approach, which enhances the Council's significance and its role.

Japan is now pursuing a program of structural reform in order to revitalize its economy. In the course of implementing serious but painful reforms, ODA will not be unaffected. More than ever, Japan is accountable to its taxpayers for the contribution of ODA it makes to the development of developing countries.

Nevertheless, Japan is determined to continue to take part in the activities of ECOSOC with the co-operation and understanding of all of you.

In closing, I would like to express my sincere hope that the Council will continue to play an important role for the peace and prosperity of the world.

Thank you.