



Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations

866 United Nations Plaza, New York, N.Y. 10017 Phone: (212) 223-4300 · www.un.int/japan/

(check against delivery)

Statement by Dr. Shigesato Takahashi
Deputy Director-General
National Institute of Population and Social Security Research
Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare
Forty-second Session of the United Nations Commission on Population and
Development
31 March 2009
New York

Madame Chair,

First of all, allow me to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your election as Chairwoman of the 42nd session of the Commission on Population and Development.

Madame Chair,

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which is one of the main themes of this 42nd session, is a compilation of a number of development goals previously affirmed by the international community. The goals of providing universal primary education and decreasing infant and maternal mortality rates, as emphasized in the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994, are naturally incorporated into the MDGs.

According to the MDGs Report 2008 issued by the UN, the world is generally making progress towards these goals, but Sub-Saharan Africa is falling behind and we need to find ways to get this region back on track. Although the MDGs and other internationally agreed goals provide us with a set of benchmarks towards poverty reduction, it is ultimately up to us to identify specific ways of achieving these goals. In this sense, I think it could be useful to share with you the past experiences of Japan, which rose from the devastation of World War II and has developed into the world's second biggest economy.

Madame Chair,

In the immediate aftermath of World War II some six decades ago, health and welfare measures for people suffering from poverty, particularly returnees from Asian countries and the unemployed, were among the first policies that the government of Japan had to put in place. It was urgent to develop policies for ensuring sufficient nutrition and prevention of infectious diseases such as cholera in order to deal with serious nutrient deficiency among the population and improve their living conditions exacerbated by poor environmental sanitation. In response to these challenges, the government of Japan quickly brought many laws and regulations into force, including “the Preventive Vaccine Law”, “the Tuberculosis control Law” and “the Quarantine Law.”

Afterwards came the period of rapid economic growth. From 1955 and 1965, as people’s living standards improved, the government of Japan strengthened efforts to develop water supply systems and improve food safety in the field of public health etc, in addition to providing continued support for those suffering from poverty as well as those with special needs.

More than four decades have passed since then, and Japanese society looks very different today, enjoying an average life expectancy of 79.19 years for men and 85.99 years for women. However, Japan’s population started to shrink in 2005 for the first time since we started taking demographic statistics, and the total fertility rate went down 1.26, the lowest level ever seen. Prospects for improvement are not on the horizon as the number of births is expected to decrease by more than half by 2055. Rapid population decrease from an aging society with fewer children may well affect the whole social and economic fabric of Japan through, for example, a shrunken work force and an increase in the number of single households, threatening the foundation of Japan’s socio-economic sustainability.

In order to address this serious situation, the Government of Japan has two main strategies. First, it is necessary to get more youth, women and senior citizens to participate in the labor market and to make it easier for people to get married, give birth and raise children.

Through the Forth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICADIV) and G8 Hokkaido Toyako Summit last year, the Government of Japan has taken various initiatives related to MDGs. For example, it has confirmed once again at the TICAD Ministerial Follow-up Meeting on March 21st in Botswana that Japan is determined to carry out its commitments, made at TICADIV without delay, including doubling its ODA to Africa by 2012. In addition, the Government of Japan has announced that it will be providing up to 4 billion US dollars in concessional loans to Africa over a five-year period, while expediting the implementation, as early as possible, of 2 billion US dollars in grant and technical assistance programs. With a view to the attainment of the MDGs, Japan will support the efforts of African countries even more strongly in such areas as community development, education, health, and water and sanitation.

For Asia, which holds great potential with about 40% of the world's population and an average economic growth rate of roughly 4% in recent years, Prime Minister Taro Aso expressed at the World Economic Forum in 2009 Japan's readiness to provide ODA not less than 1.5 trillion yen in total (17 billion US dollars equivalent), to support Asian countries.

The population issue is no doubt one of the most crucial among development challenges as it has a profound effect on the attainment of the MDGs, with impacts on poverty, education, gender, environment, and health especially reproductive health. Japan has announced several health-related initiatives over the years and made contributions to organizations that have targeted programs in the field of population and reproductive health such as UNFPA and IPPF.

Madame Chair,

Cooperating towards the achievement of internationally agreed goals is essential for addressing development and population issues, and measures are required that adequately correspond to reality. I can assure you that Japan intends to continue its efforts to build a world where people can enjoy safe and sound lives.

Thank you.