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# Japan

PERMANENT MISSION OF JAPAN TO THE UNITED NATIONS

866 United Nations Plaza, New York, N.Y. 10017 (212) 223-4300

Press Release

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**Statement by H.E. Mr. Hitoshi Honda  
Ambassador of the Multilateral Cooperation Department  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

**Thirty-second Session of the  
Commission on Population and Development  
22 March 1999, New York**

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to extend my warm congratulations to you on your election as Chairman of the current session of the United Nations Commission on Population and Development. My warm congratulations also go to the other members of the bureau.

The Japanese delegation expresses its hearty appreciation to the secretariat for the valuable reports it has prepared, focusing on important elements relating to "Population growth, structure and distribution." We believe that these reports will provide the Commission with a firm basis for discussing the progress that has been made since the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo 1994.

(Population growth)

Mr. Chairman,

Shortly after World War II, Japan underwent rapid population growth, and succeeded in solving our population problem through various endeavors and contributions both by the government and private sector. Thus, we have had a deep interest in population problems. According to the latest official population projections, Japan's population will reach its peak in 2007 and thereafter begin to decline, and it is expected to continue to decline throughout the 21st century, falling from the present figure of 126 million to roughly 100 million by 2050, and then further declining to possibly around 67 million by the year 2100. In other words, while Japan's population expanded throughout the 20th century at the average annual rate of 830 thousand people, it is expected to decrease over the course of the 21st century at an average annual rate of

60 thousand people. More recently, Japan, like the other industrialized nations, has been dealing with the problem of the rapid aging of its population.

(Population structure)

Mr. Chairman,

Due to increased longevity and declining fertility below the replacement level since the middle of the 1970s, from the beginning of the 21st century on, it is expected that the Japanese population become progressively smaller and, at the same time, progressively older. Long-term low fertility is bringing about a particularly acute decline in the proportion of working-age population, leading to the shrinking of the nation's laborforce. Japan's current total fertility rate, as determined in 1997, stands at 1.39, considerably short of 2.08 births per women, which is the rate required simply to maintain the population in the long-run. Furthermore, the proportion of the elderly, those aged 65 and over, within the overall population was assessed as 14.6% in 1995, but this figure is expected to rise to 25% by 2015 and reach the level of 32% by 2050. In light of these trends, Japan is tackling two vital issues: (1) ensuring that it has an adequate working population in the long run and (2) ensuring that Japanese society provides adequate support to its elderly citizens.

In order to secure a **sufficient** working population it is essential to realize a society in which men and women can participate on an equal basis. Based on this assumption, in 1996 Japan formulated "The Plan for Gender Equality 2000-A National Plan of Action for the Promotion of a Gender Equal Society by the Year 2000." This plan sets forth four basic targets, which include "achieving gender equality in the workplace, family and **community**." Various measures are being implemented under the plan. In addition, in order to secure equal treatment for women and men in the area of employment, and to enable women to enjoy more extensive range of employment opportunities and to put their abilities to the best possible use, Japan strengthened its Equal Employment Opportunity Law and improved child care leave systems to make it easier for men and women to work and manage their households at the same time.

Beyond these efforts, measures to provide more employment for the elderly, such as raising the retirement age, are also being discussed. Supporting measures for elderly people are comprised of three main areas namely pensions, medical care, and long-term care. Japan has a universal health system and every citizen subscribes to either one of the public medical insurance schemes. Also, Japan's public pension is a nationwide comprehensive system and persons insured for public pensions receive an Old-Age pension when they get old. In addition, faced with the imminent prospect of a rapidly aging population in the 21st century, Japan considers it essential to provide elderly care services, thus easing the foremost concerns associated with aging and realizing a society devoted to human welfare and longevity, in which all citizens can spend

their later years **free from** such concerns. For this purpose, Japan is promoting so-called the New Gold Plan, a new policy to promote public health care and welfare services for the elderly, which represents a comprehensive compilation of all the health care and welfare programs for the elderly. Japan is also taking steps to institute a public insurance system for fiscally guaranteeing elderly care by the year 2000. With the arrival of a hyper-aged society, we are reviewing and revising our pension and health insurance systems and exploring alternative ways of making our current systems more effective, in order to achieve a balance between the benefits to be provided and the burden to be required for supporting these systems.

(Population distribution)

Mr. Chairman,

With regard to population distribution, Japan's population is presently concentrated in the three major metropolitan areas of Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya, where approximately half of the entire population resides. Roughly one-quarter of Japan's total population is concentrated in the Tokyo metropolitan area alone, and the regional development structure of Japan is that of a single, the unipolar structure, with both population and various governmental functions concentrated in the Pacific belt having Tokyo as its focal point.

This excessive concentration of both population and industry in the major metropolitan areas has given rise to various problems in their urban centers as well as depopulating rural communities. A series of Regional Development Plans have been put forward in order to deal with these problems and to achieve more balanced regional development of Japan.

In view of an aging, shrinking population, Japan's Cabinet adopted in March 1998 a new national development plan, entitled the "Grand Design for Regional Development in the 21st Century". The plan is based on a 21st-century regional development policy that will transform the present single-axis national land structure into a new multi-axial structure, featuring four new major regional corridors. We are making various efforts to implement this plan.

(Closing)

This marks the fifth year since the ICPD adopted its Programme of Action. Over the past five years, we have seen various countries taking actions and making progress on the principles and policies **contained** in the Programme of Action. We hope this committee will continue to play an important role in evaluating implementation of the Programme of Action.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.