



Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations

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Mr. Chairman,

Japan joins the other delegations in congratulating you on your election. In addition, our thanks go to the Commission secretariat for the informative reports that serve as a basis for this meeting.

The theme before us, changing age structures of populations and their implications for development, is an inescapable reality for both developing and developed countries. As a country grows economically, the age structure of its population evolves from a pyramid, indicating a large youth population, to a bell curve to the spindle shape characteristic of an aging society with a low birth rate. This demographic transition cannot but have an effect on a country's development.

Each of the stages in this transition presents a unique set of challenges to development. In the pyramid stage, immediate actions are needed to address human security, such as improving basic health care, particularly infectious disease prevention and maternal and child health, ensuring steady supplies of food and safe drinking water, and recovering from natural disasters.

To meet the demand for stable economic growth and improved education in the bell curve stage, industrialization and infrastructure development become high priorities. Needless to say, environmental degradation and other adverse consequences of overdevelopment must be given consideration.

Finally, in the spindle stage, technology has advanced, and individuals pursue prosperity in various ways. Social values change, and the number of people who opt out of marriage and childbearing increases. This results in an aging society with a low birth rate. In addition, as large numbers of senior citizens become pensioners, an imbalance between supply and demand in the social security system is created. The major challenges in this stage are ensuring fair and sustainable social welfare for future generations and finding effective means of coping with workforce shortages.

Mr. Chairman,

Japan has gone through all of the changes I just described in only the past 60 years. We have striven to put our experience to work for the benefit of the international community, and we continue to provide support in such areas as health care, agriculture, water and sanitation, and disaster reduction, based on the concept of human security.

As you are aware, Japan is grappling with the consequences of aging and low fertility. The rising number of senior citizens is increasing the need for medical treatment, nursing care, and pension benefits. In response to this, the Japanese government revamped the pension scheme, and the long-term care insurance and the medical insurance systems between 2004 and 2006. These reforms aim at building a sustainable social security system.

Japan's social security reform is based on the ideas of extending healthy life expectancy with an emphasis on the prevention of illness, and of asking senior citizens to contribute according to their ability. This approach can serve as a reference for other countries coping with aging.

Population decline and aging are two sides of the same coin. Japan is taking proactive steps to maintain the workforce that underpins economic growth. To boost youth employment, my government is carrying out programmes that provide comprehensive job support and practical vocational skills. At the same time, a higher retirement age and job security measures for senior citizens have been introduced successfully. In addition, enhanced child care programmes and maternal leave are allowing women to raise families without sacrificing their careers. Measures for women who have temporarily stopped working for child-rearing and other reasons are also in place, based on "The Plan to Support Women's Renewed Challenges."

Mr. Chairman,

Through these reforms, Japan hopes to create a good balance between work and life—in other words, to build a society where individuals do not have to choose which to put first, their lives or their jobs.

Thank you very much.