



Statement of H.E. Mr. Norihiro Okuda
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Economic and Social Council: High-Level Segment
General Debate
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Mr. President, Distinguished Ministers, Excellencies,

I would like at the outset to welcome the agreement reached on the General Assembly resolution to be adopted this afternoon, which establishes the new composite gender entity. We believe that the new entity will ensure that all gender-related activities of the United Nations are conducted in the most efficient and effective manner.

Japan also welcomes the convening of the second Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) this year. We support the efforts to make ECOSOC a body that engages more effectively in more substantive contributions to timely policy dialogue on the economic and social challenges we are facing, and Japan has for that reason contributed to the DCF process, financially and otherwise.

Mr. President,

As we engage in preparations for the UN High-level Plenary Meeting on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Japan is pleased that ECOSOC is addressing the theme of gender equality and women's empowerment as a significant element within the process of economic and social development. Not only is enhancement of gender equality and women's empowerment one of the MDGs; it is a prerequisite for the achievement of all the other Goals. We must therefore be aware that although some progress has been made, it is not enough. Further efforts need to be made by the international community. We would also like to stress that these further efforts must be based on the ownership of each national government.

The concept of human security, which Japan has been resolutely promoting as a pillar of its diplomatic policy, has as its focus the individual and the community, and the protection of vulnerable members of society, especially women, from critical and pervasive threats, so that they may achieve "freedom from fear," "freedom from want," fulfillment and dignity. Gender equality and women's empowerment are both crucial elements of the concept of human security.

Mr. President,

Japan introduced its "Initiative on Gender and Development (GAD)" in 2005, and since that time has been doing everything in its power to mainstream gender throughout every area and every phase of its ODA programme, including policy planning, formulation, implementation and evaluation.

Based on this Initiative, it has been extending assistance that has contributed directly to the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment around the world. I would like to take a moment to offer a few examples of such cooperation in the hope that they may be given consideration as good practices.

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has been engaged with the Government of Yemen for some time now in a cooperative effort to develop girls' education in that country. As a result, the number of girls enrolled in school in Yemen has increased by 50 percent in the 59 pilot schools, and in fact the number of boys enrolling in school has increased as well, by 30 percent. These are outstanding outcomes, which demonstrate that this project has contributed to improving the general rate of enrollment and eliminating gender disparities in schools. We are therefore continuing our work with the Government of Yemen so that we can build on these positive results throughout the country.

The Trust Fund for Human Security, which Japan established in the United Nations, has funded a number of projects to assist women and girls under circumstances that leave them vulnerable. One of the more recent projects provides comprehensive assistance to women and adolescent girls caught amidst armed conflict in Nepal. The objective here has been to have an impact on health, education and poverty by providing protection and promoting empowerment.

Japan will also continue to enhance the assistance it provides in the areas of maternal and child health and protection and empowerment of victims of human trafficking.

Mr. President,

One of the most important areas in which there is room for improvement in Japan with regard to gender equality is the participation of women in the decision-making process, which remains quite low. In this regard, however, I would like to point out that there has been an encouraging development, namely, that as a result of the general election that took place last August, 54 women were elected to the House of Representatives, marking the highest proportion of women in that body in our history. Although the pace of the progress Japan is making in this area may seem slow, it will continue to make every effort to further promote gender equality.