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Statement by Dr. Yoriko Meguro
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Mr. Chairperson,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government of Japan, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. Chairperson, and other members of the new Bureau on the assumption of your important roles.

Mr. Chairperson,

I believe that the priority theme this year, “Financing for gender equality and empowerment of women,” is the one essential for us to address, and we are therefore glad that at long last we have the opportunity to do so. On the one hand, we have reaffirmed the importance of promoting women’s participation in policy- and decision-making processes based on commitments such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and Japan continues to set numerical targets for attaining its goals in this area. Disappointingly, however, Japan continues to rank low on the UNDP’s gender empowerment measure, which suggests that a financing mechanism is needed in order to lead us to achieve gender- equal society.

Mr. Chairperson,

It was to effect the changes necessary to become such a society that the Government of Japan introduced a five-year Basic Plan for Gender Equality and that it established the Gender Equality Bureau within the Cabinet Office as the national machinery in this area, one of its principal roles being the annual compilation of the gender-related budget.

Now let me introduce some of the measures that the Government of Japan is taking. First, it has declared 2008 the first year of a drive to achieve Work-Life Balance, and changing the working styles is the first priority. The Government is working to meet the interests of both women and men in balancing their work, private life, and social activities. For example, social services and infrastructure for child rearing should be enhanced so that both women and men participate in taking care of children.

To implement that goal, in the end of 2007, the government formulated a Charter for a Work-Life Balance and a set of Action Guidelines for a Work-Life Balance with specific numerical targets to be achieved. In accordance with these guidelines, measures are being taken to help create the necessary social attitudes, assist companies in the efforts they are making in this area, and provide intensive coaching on ways to shorten working hours.

Furthermore, Japan's Act on the Prevention of Spousal Violence and the Protection of Victims was amended and began to be implemented last month. As revised, the law focuses more on prevention and providing proactive protection to victims. In particular, the revised act is expected to enhance the activities of local public bodies and strengthen cooperation between public and private bodies, with the result that victims' needs will be better met.

In addition, the government is working to provide women with health care throughout their lifetimes, which will lead to further improvements in their health and to ensuring that women can bear children more safely and comfortably.

Mr. Chairperson,

Since it introduced the Initiative on Women in Development at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, Japan has also made efforts to help empower women around the world through development projects, including a project for capacity building for gender-sensitive budgeting, in Mongolia.

In addition, my government co-hosted the "ASEAN + 3 Human Security Symposium on Women & Poverty Eradication," together with the Association of Human Rights of Women in July 2007. And at the Expert Meeting with the presence of experts in gender from ASEAN countries, "Recommendations on Alleviating Feminization of Poverty in ASEAN Plus Three Countries" were presented as were policies for the reduction of poverty in the region.

In August 2007, the government, together with the UNDP and NGOs, held another symposium in Tokyo, one that helped to shed light on the importance of incorporating perspectives of gender and unpaid care work into economic and development policy. In the social system in almost every country today, there is heavy reliance on the unpaid labor of women to carry out this important responsibility. But the MDGs can never be achieved if we leave the entire job of caring for people to women. Policies and strategies therefore must be formulated that promote role-sharing in this and other areas.

Mr. Chairperson,

2008 is an extremely significant year for Japan, as we will host the Fourth Tokyo International Conference on African Development and the G8 Hokkaido Toyako Summit this year. The conference on African development, to be held in May, will be a challenge for Japan, as it will take some skill to draw successfully on the wisdom and resources of the international community in order to further advance development in Africa. And at the G8 Hokkaido Toyako Summit, Japan, as chair, is expected to take initiatives to tackling issues of truly global concern, such as climate change. At the present meeting on “Gender perspectives on climate change” as an emerging issue, we are hoping to have a fresh dialogue, one that goes beyond the view of women as vulnerable, as people who are only acted upon rather than capable themselves of taking action.

Mr. Chairperson,

Ideas about how the social system or social policies should be changed are frequently formulated from the viewpoint of men, while unpaid work that is done at home and, in general, the contribution that women make to society often go underappreciated. I would therefore like to thank the Commission on the Status of Women for choosing this ambitious theme of financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women. Upon the conclusion of our discussion, the Government of Japan promises to work with international society, international organizations, and civil society, including NGOs, in order to achieve further advances in the status and well-being of women.

I thank you, Mr. Chairperson.