



The Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population

NEWS LETTER

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JFPF/APDA hosts an Asian Parliamentarians' Study Visit on Aging

The Asian Population and Development Association (APDA), in its capacity as the secretariat of the Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population (JPFP), and with the assistance of the JPFP and the support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), organized an Asian Parliamentarians' Study Visit on Population and Development on the topic of aging.

Japan today has the world's highest proportion of elderly citizens, leading the race in the aging of societies. At the start of the 1960s, just before it entered a period of rapid growth, Japan introduced a number of social, pension, and medical insurance schemes, including a universal health insurance system. With these measures the country succeeded in moderating the social disparities that arose as it grew richer, putting its middle class on a sound footing which in turn led to broader social stability and further growth and development. Although today many developing nations are experiencing economic growth, income disparities within them have widened, which has given rise to problems for their societies. For those developing nations wishing to achieve stable growth and development, the lessons to be learned from Japan's experience may well prove very useful.

Demographic transitions have quickly taken place throughout Asia as a result of the strenuous efforts that each country has taken to curb population growth, and they have been helped in that regard by the work of the JPFP. Stabilizing population growth is virtually a prerequisite for a country's sustainable long-term development, and achieving a demographic transition, where a society moves from high to low birth and death rates, is an essential process to that end. However, while a rapid demographic transition may well contribute to a country's economic development thanks to the clear benefits it brings for example in the form of a

population bonus, once those particular benefits have run their course, a rapid demographic transition will be followed by a rapid aging.



Japan's birth rate today is at a low level that would have been almost unimaginable 50-60 years ago. Its population is now aging rapidly, and as a result the sustainability of its social insurance programmes in the long run has become a growing problem. But rather than bury its head in the sand over this consequence of its own demographic transition, Japan is embracing the aging of its society, and not just financially, but also for the responsibility it endows from being in the lead of Asia's demographic transition. Japan needs to communicate its own experience in this area so that it can stand as an inspiration for others.

It was from this aim, of wanting to share Japan's experience with other countries to help them develop their own policy strategies for the aging that their societies will come to experience, that parliamentarians from six Asian countries (Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam), along with representatives of the secretariats of national committees in different countries working on population and development issues, were invited to Japan to visit places in Tokyo and Nagano Prefecture in order to see and learn about some of Japan's practices themselves.

On July 28, the first day of their visit, the Tour participants visited the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare (MHLW). Here they were given an explanation of "JAPAN VISION: HEALTH CARE 2035", an initiative of MHLW Minister Yasuhisa Shiozaki, representing Japan's status as one of the leading nations in population health and medical care. Next at a meeting of JFPF's International Cooperation Committee, the visitors heard a talk by Hon. Keizo Takemi, AFPPD Chair, JFPF Executive Director, and Chair of JFPF's International Cooperation Committee, on the need for countries to prepare policies for the aging of their society. The visitors went on to hear an explanation from the Ministry of Finance on the challenges surrounding tax collection, health insurance, and expenditure on pensions, before hearing a talk from Dr. Naohiro Ogawa, a Nihon University College of Economics professor from the Population Research Institute at Nihon University (NUPRI), on issues surrounding aging societies and shrinking birth rates, including National Transfer Accounts (NTA).

Next, over July 29 to 31, the Tour participants visited Nagano Prefecture, which has both Japan's highest average life expectancies and its oldest population with the greatest health levels, to learn how this region achieved these successes.



In Nagano Prefecture's Suzaka City, the participants learned how the local residents achieved their healthy life expectancy in part as a result of an initiative that they themselves came up with. Public health nurses are officials who helped people improve their health as part of the "New Life Campaigns" set up in the years following World War II. Residents of Suzaka City would see these public health nurses out and about, and felt a strong urge to help them with their work. This keenness to help led to the start of their activities as health promoters, which also proved to be a major catalyst for the introduction of family planning and other health programmes. This citizen-led initiative is still going strong today, and at the Third Smart Life Project Awards held last year, Suzaka City's Health Promoters' Association won the Health, Labour, and Welfare Minister's Most Excellence Award. The goals of Suzaka City's health promoter program are to get as many people as possible to experience being a public health promoter, and to get health-related knowledge out to each and every family. As a result, a member of every family is urged to serve as a public health promoter, and in order to give many people this opportunity, promoters are limited to serving for two years. The Tour participants were particularly impressed that this was not an officially organized programme funded with public monies, but was being run purely by citizens on a volunteer basis.

At the Nagano Prefectural Government Office the visitors were welcomed with a speech by the Governor of Nagano Prefecture, Mr. Shuichi Abe, in which they learned how Nagano residents'



lives had been improved by their own efforts, as well as about other healthy life expectancy initiatives being taken by the Prefectural Government. These included programmes that aimed

to get people to reduce their salt intake and increase their consumption of vegetables, and to achieve high rates of employment for senior citizens. In both those particular programmes Nagano Prefecture topped the nation.

At the community-based multi-functional facility Suzaka Yasuragi-no-Sono, a wider range of services are provided tailored to the needs and wishes of its users. In addition, at the nursery center in the premises where older people can interact with small children, encounters of a day-to-day nature between the two generations give older people stimulus and a greater enjoyment of life, as well as develop a spirit of rich kindness in the children. The Tour participants were won over by the facility's approaches of promoting exchanges with other

countries, deepening mutual understanding, and advancing people's welfare, in addition to their intended goal of raising general welfare in the community.

Much of Nagano Prefecture consists of remote, rural districts, which suffer from a shortage of medical facilities. Under the slogan of "Together With Farmers" Saku Central Hospital has been putting its energies into preventative medical campaigns such as mass health screenings and organizing special consultation days by outreach teams of doctors and nurses, in order to provide support for the medical care and welfare of remote farming villages in mountainous regions. It is a sign of how the spirit of Dr. Toshikazu Wakatsuki, who was known as the "father of rural medicine" and who was responsible for the Hospital's growth and success, lives on today. The hospital's Community Care Division, Visiting Nurse Station and Home Care Support Center are playing the leading role in home care and welfare activities in the communities. The hospital also has Doctor-Helicopter services, providing emergency medical care across the entire Prefecture.



Many of the participants said that they had been exposed to a whole new perspective on policies and programmes for dealing with an aging society, which had been extremely valuable. They added that they would very much like to adopt those programmes which they thought could work in their own countries.

Nepal Earthquake

Request of the Nepal Federation of Parliamentarians for Population and Development (NFPPD) for reconstruction support

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