



The Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population

NEWS LETTER

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Strengthening the Capacity of Parliamentarians for the Achievement of the SDGs: Ageing, Fertility and Youth Empowerment, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

On 12 June, the Asian Population and Development Association (APDA), which serves as the Secretariat for the Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population (JPFP), organized the Asian parliamentarians' conference titled, "Strengthening the Capacity of Parliamentarians for the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals", with a particular focus on ageing, fertility and youth empowerment. The conference was hosted by the State Great Hural (Parliament) of Mongolia and was supported by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).



The number of people aged 65 and above, as percentage of the total world population (the ratio of older population), rose from 5.1% in 1950 to 8.3% in 2015, and is expected to rise further to 18.1% in 2060.¹ In Asia, in particular, populations in the Republic of Korea, Singapore, and China are forecasted to age faster than in Japan. Rapid ageing is also expected in developing countries.

Population ageing occurs due to two factors: lower fertility and longer life expectancy. In particular, in countries with extremely low fertility, such as Japan and the Republic of Korea, low fertility brings about seismic changes in the social structure, impacting substantially on such countries' sustainable development. At the conference, parliamentarians and experts from 11 Asian countries and representatives from UN organizations and NGOs discussed both issues of ageing and declining fertility in Asia. They explored ways to design policies for youth empowerment including investment in youth education and promotion of employment opportunities and to respond to declining fertility and gender equality, which go hand in hand with policy on the elderly, as important topics to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). From Japan, Hon. Dr. Karen Makishima, a member of the House of Representatives, represented JPFP and read the Address of the Organizer on behalf of H.E. Yasuo Fukuda, Chair of APDA and Honorary Chair of JPFP (The full script of the Address of the Organizer is shown below). She also gave a presentation on efforts made by Japan on "Empowerment of Youth and Women".



After parliamentarians and experts gave presentations, participants engaged in spirited discussions and adopted the Ulaanbaatar Declaration, which clarified parliamentarians' role in achieving the SDGs, as the outcome of the conference.

¹ Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, *Heisei 29 nen kourei shakai hakusho (zentaiban)* (Annual Report on the Aging Society: 2017), http://www8.cao.go.jp/kourei/whitepaper/w-2017/html/zenbun/s1_1_5.html.

On the following day on 13 June, the delegates visited the operations center of the Mongolian Family Welfare Association (MFWA), a member association of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), in Ulaanbaatar. MFWA has branches in 15 out of 21 provinces in Mongolia. In cooperation with the government and international organizations, it provides citizens, especially pregnant women, with reproductive health (RH) services including and family planning. The delegates toured the center, saw how the services were provided, and had an exchange with young people participating in adolescent programmes to promote knowledge and awareness of RH.



The delegates then visited the Tuv Province General Hospital to study “telemedicine” provided by UNFPA. Mongolia has a small population over its expansive land, and well-equipped health care facilities are concentrated in the capital Ulaanbaatar where more than 40% of Mongolia’s population live. Therefore, telemedicine is an effective method in Mongolia, connecting physicians in remote areas with those in Ulaanbaatar via Internet for advice on diagnosis and treatment. At this General Hospital, the delegates were told that telemedicine, being used to have pregnant women examined by physicians in Ulaanbaatar, has resulted in reducing the maternal mortality rate. The Hospital Director, who has participated in a training programme organized by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in Japan, expressed a strong wish to “cooperate with Japan’s health care institutions using telemedicine to treat difficult cases”. Japan’s contribution in such systematic cooperation could take its international cooperation a step forward in this field.



After the study visit, the delegates had the opportunity to appreciate traditional Mongolian culture as the Chair of the State Great Hural (Parliament) of Mongolia generously made arrangements to have a mini Naadam (a traditional Mongolian summer festival) organized especially for the delegates.

Address of the Organizer

Yasuo Fukuda
 Former Prime Minister of Japan
 Honorary Chair, Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population (JPFP)
 Chair, Asian Population and Development Association (APDA)

I extend my sincere appreciation to you for gathering here today to attend the conference and study visit on *the Capacity of Parliamentarians for the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals: Ageing, Fertility and Empowerment*.

In 2015, the General Assembly of the United Nations unanimously adopted the Sustainable Development Goals, or which aim to achieve a future for humanity that is sustainable. It is fair to categorize the SDGs as the outcome of a awareness that we currently stand at a critical turning point, and that a “business as usual” approach to the global problems that we face will deny us the chance to achieve sustainable development for ourselves and future generations. Along with the relentless march of globalization, an ever expanding world population will continue to have a serious impact on the Earth’s environment, and on the resources it can provide.

Mongolia is a country blessed with a vast territory, and with some three million inhabitants, some might argue that its population could comfortably expand even further. But it is not possible to discuss the size of this or that country’s population in isolation, and it is well established that countries will find it difficult to achieve sustainable development so long as their population remains in a growth phase. I think it is also important for a country’s population to be compatible with its economic activities, and furthermore that it be of an appropriate size given the carrying capacity of the particular natural environment in which that country finds itself.

I understand that Mongolia’s population, which is currently expanding, has started to concentrate around the country’s capital, Ulaanbaatar. It is also my understanding that average life expectancy is low in Mongolia when compared to the level of the country’s social development, and while that expectancy is said to be steadily improving, the country still faces a number of challenges in the areas of public and reproductive health, such as a high maternal mortality rate.

In order to tackle these issues, it will be important for Mongolia to invest in education and to develop appropriate social insurance programmes centered on public health, with the aim of empowering generations of young people who enjoy good health. It will also be important for the country to build up its social and economic structures, starting with

infrastructure in its cities, so that it can make the best use of its growing population.

The issues surrounding global population today are much diversified. While Africa continues to experience significant population growth, countries in Europe and East Asia instead face challenges arising from an ageing population.

Judging from Japan's case, unless a country properly capitalizes on that period of population bonus, it will not be able to develop for example proper social security systems including universal health coverage (UHC) system.

I would humbly and strongly invite Mongolia to learn as much as it can from Japan's experience. In addition to advancing the welfare of the Mongolian people, I believe that learning from this experience would help Mongolia build a nation that enjoys sound economic growth in harmony with the environment, developing thriving regional areas as well to achieve the full potential of this vast country.

Although each country faces its own particular set of challenges, I think a common goal of all of us gathered here today is to build a society in which all newborns are blessed and in which men and women, regardless of age, can participate in various forms in accordance with their ability and aspirations.

APDA is committed to contribute as much as possible to the achievement of the SDGs around population issues. In closing, I would like to express my sincere hope for you to engage in earnest discussions and have a fruitful conference. Thank you very much.

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