



The Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population

NEWS LETTER

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JPPF Invites UNFPA's New Executive Director to a Joint Committee Meeting

Introduction

On June 29 in the 1st Members' Offices Building of the House of Representatives, JPPF held a Joint Committee Meeting to which it welcomed the Panamanian-born Dr. Natalia Kanem, Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and a United Nations Under Secretary-General. Dr. Kanem was visiting Japan for the first time since her appointment in October of last year. The Meeting was also attended by Mr. Arthur Erken, Director of UNFPA's Division of Communications and Strategic Partnerships at its headquarters in New York; Mr. Pio Smith, UNFPA Chief of Staff; and Ms. Mariko Sato and Ms. Fuyo Ueno, Director and Assistant to the Director respectively of UNFPA Tokyo Office.



Since 2000 UNFPA has focused its work on human rights and sexual reproductive rights (SRR). At the same time, however, differences among cultures and religions have hampered the development of a common understanding of what constitutes “rights” in this area, and that has led to the situation where specific programmes cannot be undertaken in Arab and African countries. There are also additional challenges in the

sense that this area arguably lacks the urgency, especially when compared with crisis situations such as those pertaining to a child's right to exist, to the lives of refugees, or to the protection of people's lives in the event of an epidemic.

Now, UNFPA's own goals for its activities have undergone a momentous transformation. While adhering to its basic stance that it handles population issues within the context of universal human rights, UNFPA has set specific targets of the “triple zeros” (or so-called “three transformative and people-centred results”) for addressing population issues, without stirring up controversy over values or specific rights. Setting these targets has made clearer the activities that UNFPA ought to be performing.

JPPF Joint Committee Meeting

In his opening address, JPPF Acting Chair Hon. Ichiro Aisawa first pointed out the close linkage between achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and finding solutions to population issues. In view of one estimate that Africa's population will increase to as much as four billion, unless the conditions are put in place there that will allow such a level of population to be a driver for development by providing the right opportunities for education and employment and by bringing about improvements to the general state of people's health, Hon. Aisawa said that such a huge increase in population would only produce a situation that was highly fraught with problems. He then noted that the number of refugees around the world has been increasing, and according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) the number has reached 68.5 million. Lastly he observed that although average life expectancy in Sierra Leone, which he visited as Chair of the Japan-Africa Union Parliamentary Friendship League, has risen from 36 a few years ago to close to 50, that is still an appalling reality.

Dr. Kanem then gave a speech entitled “The work of UNFPA and its partnership with JPPF”. She expressed her deep thanks to JPPF, which for 45 years has been an enabler for Japan's ongoing support, both financial and political, to the

United Nations and UNFPA. In addition, she was thankful to APDA, which serves as JPPF's Secretariat, and to the Japanese government for the Japanese contribution which covers a wide range of areas, including sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR), family planning, young people, ageing societies, falling birth rates, and gender equality. She stressed that if the world was going to achieve the SDGs, it was going to be important to build societies that gave proper consideration to the role of women, allowing all members of society to access SRH services. To realize such societies, Dr. Kanem added, as important partners of UNFPA, Japan's parliamentarians play a very big part. She also revealed that to publicize the assistance that UNFPA received from Japan to a wider international audience, the organization was working to highlight Japan's assistance on its website.

Lastly Dr. Kanem pointed out that several major conferences were going to be held in Japan next year, including the G20 Summit and the 7th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VII). This was additionally significant because next year will mark 25 years since the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, and 50 years since UNFPA came into existence. She expressed the hope that the already close cooperation between Japan and UNFPA would only grow stronger in multiple areas in the lead-up to next year's events.



Discussion

JPPF Executive Director and AFPPD Chair Hon. Keizo Takemi noted that in October an international conference on "Investing in Youth" will be held in Kazakhstan. He expressed the wish that as many legislators as possible attend this conference, in order to ensure its success. Dr. Kanem expressed a positive attitude that UNFPA would also like to extend as much assistance to the conference as it could.

Hon. Emiko Takagai, Vice-Chair of JPPF's Domestic Measures Committee, noted the need for measures to tackle the discrimination against people with infectious diseases that, as a professional working in the area of public health, she sensed when she visited Central Africa. She also commented on how discrimination towards women, particularly in Japan, was becoming a problem recently, and she asked what sort of specific policies UNFPA had adopted in that regard.

Dr. Kanem replied that UNFPA advocates "rights for all", and that when it comes to SRHR, both men and women needed to take action. With regard to discrimination against people with HIV/AIDS, she said she was hopeful that countries' lawmakers would undertake efforts to change social attitudes and adopt better government policies in a way that places the focus on the plight of women, who are particularly affected by discrimination.

Referring to his own experiences in Africa, Hon. Hideki Makihara, State Vice Minister of Health, Labour, and Welfare, asked in relation to next year's TICAD VII agenda what the geographical regions in Africa and the areas are that should be given the greatest attention, so that Japan provides the greatest assistance it can. Dr. Kanem replied in response that based on her experiences when she served as UNFPA Representative in Tanzania that "Everywhere in Africa has major problems. In order to solve those problems, it will be important to properly harness the continent's demographic dividend, for example by promoting employment opportunities for young people and by advancing universal health coverage (UHC). Also to that end UNFPA wants to undertake its programmes that allow everyone to have access to SRH

services including family planning, so as to let people avoid unwanted pregnancies". She then mentioned how crucial Japan's support is in current humanitarian crises, and she expressed her thanks for the contribution Japan has been making in support of the Rohingya refugee issue.

JPPF Vice-Chair Hon. Teruhiko Mashiko said, "In the midst of major change affecting global affairs, Japan's low fertility rates represent a pioneering experience for the world. This issue currently represents something of a crisis for the country, but JPPF is among those actively working to address it, and I want to take efforts for Japan's policies in this regard to be presented as a model to the rest of the world when following in Japan's footsteps. Dr. Kanem replied that the influence of Japan's experience in this regard is huge, and because UNFPA has also put declining birth rates on its agenda, it wants to tackle this issue using what it learns from Japan.

JPPF Director Hon. Ryuhei Kawada said that as a person living with HIV/AIDS he has been working on the issue of discrimination both at home and abroad. He said however that there is still not enough understanding among Japanese people about sexuality. He also said he looked forward to working together further with UNFPA with respect to discrimination against women, with a view to finding a solution to this issue in the future.

Hon. Takeaki Matsumoto, a former Minister for Foreign Affairs, commented that in the coming years he would be working on the issues raised above, in particular the work relating to UHC.

In conclusion Hon. Aisawa observed that so long as the SDGs remain unrealized, people need to appreciate that the greatest problem the world faces is the threat from Africa's population exploding from its current level of over 1.2 billion to as much as four billion. Much more work will be required if an Africa is to be realized that has well-developed levels of education, public health, and employment. With those remarks, Hon. Aisawa formally closed the Meeting.

9. UNFPA embraces the vision set forth in the 2030 Agenda. UNFPA will organize its work around three transformative and people-centred results in the period leading up to 2030. These include: (a) an end to preventable maternal deaths; (b) an end to the unmet need for family planning; and (c) an end to gender-based violence and all harmful practices, including female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriage (see figure 2).

FIGURE 2. Universal and people-centred transformative results

