



The Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population

NEWS LETTER

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Arab and Asian Parliamentarians' Meeting and Study Visit on Population and Development for ICPD+25 held in Morocco

The Asian Population and Development Association (APDA), the secretariat of the Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population (JPFP), organized the "Arab and Asian Parliamentarians' Meeting and Study Visit on Population and Development for ICPD+25" in Morocco on 18-20 September. This programme was hosted by the House of Councillors of the Kingdom of Morocco and supported by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Japan Trust Fund (JTF), and the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF).

This is the third year the event has taken place, following parliamentarians' meetings in Jordan in 2017 and in Bahrain last year, in close coordination with UNFPA's Arab States Regional Office (ASRO). The aim was to reach a consensus of opinions among Arab and Asian parliamentarians on concrete measures to fulfill the unfinished agenda of the ICPD Programme of Action (PoA) prior to the Nairobi Summit scheduled to be held in November this year to mark the ICPD's 25th anniversary.

The participants gathered on the first day, September 18, in the House of Councillors' building in Rabat, and the second-day meeting was held at a hotel in Casablanca. Among the 60 attendees were parliamentarians and representatives of national committees on population and development from 18 countries¹, parliament officers, officials of UNFPA and cooperating partners, as well as members of the media. The opening ceremony began with an address by H.E. Abdelhakim Benchamach, President of the House of Councillors of Morocco. Hon. Teruhiko Mashiko, Vice-Chair of JPFP and Member of the Board of the Directors of APDA, delivered a speech representing APDA and JPFP. Hon. Marwan Al-Hmoud, Secretary General of the Forum of Arab Parliamentarians on Population and Development (FAPPD) and MP from Jordan, and Dr. Luay Shabaneh, UNFPA ASRO Regional Director, also gave speeches on behalf of the cooperating and supporting organizations.



[Gist of the organizer's speech by Hon. Teruhiko Mashiko, Vice-Chair of JPFP]

The organizer of this meeting, APDA, fully supported the International Conference of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (ICPPD) held prior to the ICPD in 1994. The ICPPD was attended by a total of 300 legislators from 117 countries around the world, and the declaration adopted was reflected in the ICPD PoA's Preamble and Principles and shaped the concept of the ICPD PoA, which constitutes the basis of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

¹ Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Japan, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Nepal, Palestine, Philippines, Sudan, Sri Lanka, Syria, Tajikistan and Tunisia

The significance of the ICPD can be found in the paradigm shift, which enhanced the recognition that population is the foundation of society, and that the aim of sustainable development is the realization of a society where all people can live with dignity. For lawmakers to complete the ICPD's remaining tasks, it is important to address the following:

1. Reconfirm the ICPD Declaration and the principles of the ICPD PoA in 1994 and focus efforts on meeting the conditions for realizing human rights and reproductive rights (RR) defined by the ICPD.
2. Ensure that women have the right to decide freely and that universal access to reproductive health (RH) is achieved in order to prevent unwanted pregnancies; and place the initiative at the heart of the framework of universal health coverage (UHC).
3. Based on the understanding that the extreme decline in birthrates experienced by developed countries, including Japan, impedes the efforts to attain a sustainable society, create an environment where having children is possible as desired as part of the countermeasures to this trend.
4. Revisit ICPD's principles to tackle the challenges faced by each country, such as conserving the environment, ensuring food security, securing employment, or addressing the educational gender gap, and include population issues from a broad perspective, trigger changes in national policies and devote the necessary resources for that purpose.

The activities of parliamentarians constitute the fourth pillar of the efforts to achieve the SDGs, and their active engagement is a precondition for accomplishing the SDGs. I hope we will be able to identify the important issues in this meeting and present our recommendations at the Nairobi Summit.

After the opening ceremony, meeting sessions were held on the following themes.

Session 1: Finishing the Unfinished Business of the ICPD

Session 2: Population Dynamics, Population Policies and the SDGs

Session 3: Women's Empowerment, Gender Equality and Universal Access to SRH

Session 4: Panel Discussion: Parliamentarians' Roles in Addressing the ICPD Unfinished Agenda

Session 5: Discussion for the Adoption of Parliamentarians' Recommendations for the ICPD+25

During Session 4, Hon. Yoshinori Suematsu gave a presentation, in both Arabic and English, on the "Roles of Parliamentarians in Achieving the SDGs" that emphasized the following points: (1) Since the ICPD and the SDGs share the same goals, it is impossible to achieve the SDGs without accomplishing the unfinished tasks of the ICPD PoA. (2) Discussion on the complicated interpretation of RR might highlight religious and historical differences and therefore not be productive. To arrive at concrete solutions, discussions must be focused on how to achieve these rights. (3) To resolve population issues, education from an early age is essential. (4) Based on these points, the most important task for parliamentarians is to secure the national budget to tackle population issues, develop the public's understanding on this matter, and propose specific measures to address the issues.



The participants heatedly discussed the content of the declaration for nearly two hours but finally adopted the declaration unanimously. Over the past quarter century since the ICPD began in 1994, the interpretation of RR has extended beyond the ICPD PoA agreement, for instance, including abortion in RR, but some countries have continued to enforce laws that do not permit abortion under any circumstances. Conflicting values over human rights persist around the world, and while recognizing there are no solutions to these conflicts, the parliamentarians seeking to realize people's welfare compiled an effective declaration that included proposals on practical measures. The parliamentarians also faced tough questions such as how to address problems in regions where people's rights are not guaranteed due to the absence of state power, as in Palestine.

[Study tour]

After the 2-day meeting, the participants embarked on a study tour on 20 September. The participants first visited a vocational training center in Casablanca operated in coordination with private companies, followed by observation of the Human Development Center. The two centers place particular emphasis on social instability brought about by youth unemployment. The participants listened to explanations about the efforts to help young people study with hope and secure suitable jobs and observed as young people learned in earnest. Next, they visited two centers run by Moroccan philanthropists. One was a daycare center for poor or single-mother families, where mothers are provided with classes to learn French and Arabic languages and life skills, and supported in their efforts to work and earn a livelihood. The second was a cultural center striving to offer poor families the opportunity to take part in various artistic activities for a small fee.



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This event was featured by local television stations and newspapers, which helped highlight the importance of population and development issues.

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