



News

JPPF Study Meeting: COVID-19 Pandemic and Population (Birthrate), 15 March 2021

The Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population (JPPF) is organizing a series of workshops on policies and the role of parliamentarians for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a focus on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. On 15 March, JPPF organized a study meeting on the theme, “COVID-19 Pandemic and Population (Birthrate)”, together with partner organizations, which have formed an alliance called “Alliance on SDGs, Human Security, and Population”. The Alliance is composed of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), JOICFP, the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD), and APDA.

As population ageing is more advanced in Japan than anywhere else in the world, Japan has an urgent task of implementing measures to tackle challenges accompanying that, essential among which is promoting healthy longevity and addressing the issue of low fertility, another factor that contributes to population ageing. Various measures have been implemented in Japan, from the Angel Plan of 1994 to the enactment of the Act on Advancement of Measures to Support Raising Next-Generation Children and the Basic Act for Measures to Cope with Society with Declining Birthrate in 2003 and the formulation of the Outline of Measures for Society with Declining Birthrate in 2004. These measures, however, have not put a stop to the declining birthrate, which remains an urgent population issue when we consider Japan’s future. A comprehensive framework is needed to respond to these new facets of population issues. Recognizing this need, UNFPA has propounded the “life-cycle approach” that captures population issues broadly and considers both ageing and low fertility as part of life.

During the study meeting moderated by Hon. Hitoshi Kikawada, Secretary-General of JPPF, a report was made by Dr. Rintaro Mori, Regional Adviser on Population Ageing and Sustainable Development at UNFPA’s Asia and the Pacific Regional Office (APRO), on UNFPA research “The Impact of COVID-19 on Human Fertility in the Asia-Pacific Region”. Dr. Miho Iwasawa, Director of the Department of Population Dynamics Research at the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (IPSS), provided a commentary on the report as a commentator, which was followed by a Q&A session. Lastly, an announcement was made on the Health and Global Policy Institute (HGPI)’s project involving a public opinion survey on “having children in present-day Japan”, which will contribute to measures for addressing low fertility.

[Address by Hon. Prof. Keizo Takemi, JPPF Executive Director]

Infection control is an urgent task during the coronavirus pandemic. At the same time, the pandemic has had an impact on various aspects of society, and has inhibited pregnancies and births. Dr. Mori, our lecturer for today, was originally a pediatrician with clinical experience in U.K., Australia, and Japan. In addition, he has been involved in a wide variety of other activities, including policy research, which makes him well-qualified to discuss the relations between ageing and SDGs. I sincerely hope that this workshop will benefit our activities.



[Summary of Summary of Lecture by Dr. Rintaro Mori, UNFPA APRO]

To address low fertility and population ageing, we need to consider whether the wish of individuals to have children is being fulfilled, whether support is provided to different choices, and whether healthy life expectancy is being extended. As a conclusion from the policy review, there are three factors contributing to low fertility. The first is the economic factor of childrearing costs and employment burden, which is particularly marked in East Asia where enthusiasm for education runs high. The second is factors related to gender inequality arising from gender roles in the home and the fixed employment conditions, as can be witnessed particularly in East Asia, and strong links between marriage and birth, which are particularly marked in South Korea and Japan. The third is the biological factor, including the social factor of late marriage. As for policies to address these factors, it will be important to provide childrearing support for those who want to raise their children on their own, while childcare support and labor regulations will be important for those who want to raise their children while continuing to work.



To address widely varying needs of families, including one-person households, it is preferable to have a comprehensive package of measures that assure and support individual choices. Considering that the end of childrearing—the time a child becomes independent—is being delayed in comparison with the past, we must realize that existing policies do not meet the requirements of society. In addition to these general considerations, nearly 12 million women in 115 countries lost access to family planning services, leading to 1.4 million unintended pregnancies resulting from the disruptions caused by COVID-19 over the past year, according to the estimates released by UNFPA recently. A study conducted after April 2020 has shown serious conditions in developing countries where the provision of family planning supplies and services has stalled, making such supplies and services inaccessible. In Japan, an analysis found that fertility treatment has been discontinued and gender inequality in the home has increased due to the pandemic. It must be emphasized that securing services and supplies as a measure against COVID-19 goes directly to supporting individual choices on pregnancy and birth.

[Comments from Dr. Miho Iwasawa, IPSS]

The conclusion is that while there is no secret formula for addressing the issues of low fertility and population ageing, we need to think about how we address individuals' various needs when implementing policies. This is similar to setting up a row of dominoes, making sure to identify and fill gaps. Young people today seek fulfillment and recognition of their self-worth, and place value in impartiality and gender equality. When it comes to thinking about having children, social and economic stability over the long term is very important and is probably the major determinant in their decision-making.



© Q&A Session

[Hon. Teruhiko Mashiko, Vice-Chair of JPPF]

Even though various efforts were made both by the government and the private sector in addressing low fertility, it appears that those efforts have largely been ineffective. The elderly are dissatisfied with the decrease in their pensions, and young people want stable employment. Abenomics (which is a policy package for boosting the country's economy) channeled financial resources mainly to large companies, which sustained companies and enabled them to maintain employment. In that respect, young people have supported Abenomics. On the other hand, it is true that there is a gap between various needs and social policies, and it is time we review our population policies from such a perspective. I would like to have your comments on this point.



[Hon. Karen Makishima, Vice-Chair of Gender Issues Committee of JPPF]

I would like to know about the family planning supply chain.



[Hon. Shizuka Terata]

How is assessment done on unwanted pregnancies and access to family planning in Japan?

[Hon. Prof. Keizo Takemi, Executive Director of JPPF]

UNFPA has packaged the declining birthrate and population ageing in a life-cycle approach, but society itself has become fluid due to changes in the population structure. While we have many issues to address, including participation of women in society, extension of healthy life expectancy, changes in work brought about by progress in IT technology, and labor participation of foreign workers, what we need to think about is how to create and sustain vigor. While we are confronted with a major multi-faceted task, we would have fulfilled our role to a certain extent if we can show the world a Japan model of how an advanced country can address population ageing.

[Dr. Rintaro Mori, UNFPA APRO]

I think that Japan's measures for low fertility and population ageing cover multiple fields and are well thought out. It is now time, however, to review those measures based on objective facts. As for the family planning supply chain, it basically means the supply of contraceptives in developing countries. The pandemic has severed this supply chain, making access to contraceptives difficult.

[Ms. Yuko Imamura, HGPI]

HGPI is planning to conduct an opinion poll on "having children in present-day Japan", the results of which are due to be published around August.



[Closing Address by Hon. Hitoshi Kikawada, Secretary-General of JPPF]

There is a need to expand JPPF's activities and strengthen support to enable Japan to deliver on its soft power. I would like to ask members of JPPF to invite participation of other parliamentarians from both ruling and opposition parties. We hope to make efforts in sharing information widely among parliamentarians.

Established in 1974, JFPF is the world's first supra-partisan parliamentary group on population and development.

In an age when global solidarity is needed to address various challenges, JFPF is expected to play an increasingly important role as a parliamentary caucus with a long history and tradition of leading Japan's diplomacy in the international community.

In every issue of JFPF Newsletter, we will carry "News" on activities and initiatives related to population and development issues.

News:

- *JFPF Study Meeting: COVID-19 Pandemic and Population (Birthrate), 15 March 2021*
- *Inter-Regional Meeting for the Arab and Asian Parliamentarians to Follow Up on ICPD25 Commitments in a Hybrid Format, 23-24 March 2021*
- *Online Meeting "Leadership of African and Asian Parliamentarians in the Implementation of ICPD25 Commitments during the Pandemic - Part II", 9 March 2021*

[Editorial responsibility: JFPF secretariat]

Inter-Regional Meeting for the Arab and Asian Parliamentarians to Follow Up on ICPD25 Commitments in a Hybrid Format, 23-24 March 2021

On 23 and 24 March, the Asian Population and Development Association (APDA), which serves as a secretariat for JFPF, organized a conference for Arab and Asian parliamentarians in Beirut, Lebanon. The conference was held in a hybrid format, linking the conference venue in Lebanon and online participants.

This project was made possible through the cooperation of the Forum of Arab Parliamentarians on Population and Development (FAPPD) and with the support of UNFPA Arab States Regional Office (ASRO) and Japan Trust Fund (JTF). More than 90 persons participated from more than 15 countries, including parliamentarians from Arab and Asian countries and representatives from secretariats of national committees on population and development, United Nations organizations, and civil society organizations.

At the opening session, Hon. Teruhiko Mashiko (Vice-Chair of JFPF and Member of APDA Board of Directors) delivered a video message on behalf of the organizer. He emphasized that the issues of population are at the root of many global issues, including COVID-19, and that it was essential to address the issues of population in achieving the SDGs. He expressed hope that the conference would result in strengthening solidarity between the Arab world and Asia and contribute to achievement of sustainable development through the implementation of the ICPD25 Commitments.

Hon. Pierre Bou Assi (Lebanon), who made considerable contributions to organizing the conference, welcomed the participants. He said that as the world faces difficulties, we are one "global village", and called upon the participants to unite towards peace, development and well-being of the humankind.

Dr. Luay Shabaneh, UNFPA ASRO Regional Director, touched on the fact that the coronavirus pandemic had made access to sexual reproductive health (SRH) services difficult and that there had been an increase in unintended pregnancies and gender-based violence (GBV). He underlined the role and responsibility of parliamentarians in tackling these issues.



The main theme of the conference sessions was the impact of COVID-19 on reproductive health and rights (RHR) and GBV. Parliamentarians from India and other countries reported on the progress made since the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in

Cairo, Egypt, in 1994. The League of Arab States (LAS), the Lebanese Association for Family Health (SALAMA), which is a member association of IPPF, and other civil society organizations gave presentations on their respective programmes, which were followed by discussions. Based on those discussions, the participants deliberated on and adopted a roadmap for the future.

At the closing session, Hon. Pierre Bou Assi reiterated his appreciation to all of those who made efforts in organizing the conference under difficult circumstances in Lebanon. Based on the progress made so far in the ICPD Programme of Action, he encouraged the participants by saying, "We have hope for the future in front of us", as the conference came to a close.

Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population (JPFP)

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Online Meeting “Leadership of African and Asian Parliamentarians in the Implementation of ICPD25 Commitments during the Pandemic - Part II”, 9 March 2021

On 9 March, APDA organized an online meeting titled, “Leadership of African and Asian Parliamentarians in the Implementation of ICPD25 Commitments during the Pandemic - Part II”, with the cooperation of the African Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development (FPA) and with the support of UNFPA East and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO) and Japan Trust Fund (JTF).



For this online meeting, some 50 persons from 21 African and Asian countries participated, including parliamentarians, parliamentary staff members, United Nations officers, experts from Southern African Development Community (SADC), and representatives from civil society organizations, to share information about the current state and measures and to have an active exchange of opinions.

In the opening session, Hon. Asahiko Mihara (Deputy President of the Japan-AU Parliamentary Friendship League and Director of JPFP) gave an address. He expressed strong concern about the negative impact of COVID-19 globally on employment, health, and education of youth, and explained that Japan is promoting international cooperation by providing assistance in the health field through TICAD and the COVID-19 Crisis Response Emergency Support Loan for the purpose of strengthening health capacity and promoting social and economic recovery.

Ms. Justine Coulson, UNFPA ESARO Deputy Regional Director, then spoke about the increasing importance, under the COVID-19 pandemic, of UNFPA’s mission of “three zeros” (zero maternal mortality; zero unmet need for access to family planning; and zero gender-based violence and harmful practices, such as child marriage). She noted the need for parliamentarians to urgently address issues faced by women, girls, and young people.

In the sessions that followed, Ms. Gift Malunga, UNFPA Country Representative for Zambia, Mr. Sam Ntelamo, Resident Representative to the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) IPPF Liaison Office, and Hon. Atupele Mwakibete (Tanzania) each gave a presentation, from their respective viewpoints, on programmes for, and challenges related to, promoting SRH, ending GBV, and empowering women and youth. In the discussions, the importance of having this kind of conference as a venue for discussing intra- and inter-regional cooperation among parliamentarians, international organizations, and civil society organizations was emphasized. Participants expressed appreciation to APDA and UNFPA for hosting and supporting the platform, respectively.



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