

Established in 1974, JPPF 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, JPPF 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 JPPF Newsletter, we will carry "News" on activities and initiatives related to population and development issues.

News:

○ JPPF Study Meeting on Afghanistan Assistance and Launch of PT

[Editorial responsibility: JPPF secretariat]

News

JPPF Study Meeting on Afghanistan Assistance and Launch of PT

On 4 August, the Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population (JPPF) held a study meeting on Afghanistan assistance. Hon. Hitoshi Kikawada, Secretary-General of JPPF, moderated the meeting. First, the Hon. Keizo Takemi, Executive Director of JPPF, gave an address in which he said, "I would like to ask for your cooperation so that Japan can actively play its international role and support the Afghan people".



Hon. Kikawada then explained that a study meeting was held last December on the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and that a set of recommendations developed with Dr. Daisaku Higashi of Sophia University, who served as a lecturer at that meeting, was submitted to the Japanese government ([JPPF e-Newsletter No.113](#)). He also explained that a follow-up meeting was subsequently organized last March ([JPPF e-Newsletter No.117](#)). He then proposed a motion, with Hon. Yoko Kamikawa, Chair of JPPF, to "set up a project team (PT) within JPPF to properly and specifically follow up and work on the issues of Afghanistan". With the backing of the participating parliamentarians, the Afghanistan Assistance PT was officially established.



"A Year After the Taliban Came to Power. What Japan Can Do for Stability in the Middle East"

[Dr. Daisaku Higashi, Center for Global Education and Discovery, Sophia University]

Having been engaged in Afghanistan for many years, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to JPPF for launching the PT to continuously work on the country's issues. Almost a year from the political upheaval, due to the economic collapse and farmland decimated by drought, some 23 million people out of Afghanistan's population of 40 million have been experiencing food shortages since October last year. The United Nations warns that 9 million still face the risk of starvation.



The economic sanctions have had a significantly negative humanitarian impact, hitting women and children particularly hard. This has led the United States to take a more practical approach. At the end of July, they began discussions with the Taliban interim government on ways to return \$3.5 billion from \$7 billion in the frozen assets of Afghanistan's central bank. The focus is on how to normalize the economy and protect Afghan people's rights to life, regardless of whether or not to recognize the Taliban government.

As for the activities of Japanese NGOs, around 10 NGOs are continuing their work in consultation with the Taliban. In an interview with four such organizations, namely, the Peshawar-kai, Karez Health and Educational Services, AAR Japan, and Peace Winds Japan, there has reportedly not been a single interference by the Taliban in their activities from August last year to 2 August this year. In fact, the Taliban are appreciative of their work. At the last JPPF study meeting, I explained that organizations cannot send money from Japan even though remittances for humanitarian assistance are not in breach of the sanctions. Through inquiries to Japanese banks made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Hon. Kikawada in his role as State Minister for Financial Services, as well as information sharing among the NGOs, we have now secured a route, albeit an unstable one, for sending money to Afghanistan.

The security situation has drastically improved under the Taliban interim government. For girls, elementary schools and universities reopened. Secondary school education for girls has resumed in some 10 provinces but not in the remaining 24 or so. There is a need to continue to prod the Taliban, but the issues of gender and rights are intricately related to people's sense of values and culture as in other Middle East countries. More dialogue and time will be needed.

The five recommendations drawn up on 8 December 2021, were as follows:

- 1 First, expand humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan so as to sustain life;
- 2 In addition to international organizations, increase support for Japanese NGOs as much as possible;

Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population (JPFP)

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- 3 Adopt a broader definition of humanitarian assistance and provide assistance not only in the fields of food and health care, but also in education and agriculture (water canals and irrigation);
- 4 As a true friend of the United States, convey to the U.S. government that financial sanctions need to be lifted as soon as possible to save lives. This will also be in the best interest of policy against international terrorism (containing ISIS-K) and China; and
- 5 In cooperation with Central Asian countries (C5) and Middle East countries (Saudi Arabia and Qatar), the Japanese government should co-host the “Afghanistan Humanitarian Conference” with the United Nations in 2022 or 2023.

The five recommendations remain the same in the present situation. With regard to agriculture, in particular, the Peshawar-kai rehabilitated 16,500 hectares of farmland over 20 years through Dr. Tetsu Nakamura’s irrigation system. To spread the irrigation system to all of Afghanistan, they worked with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to develop a textbook (DVD and book) in Japanese, English, Dari, and Pashto. This kind of agricultural rehabilitation support is critically important in helping Afghanistan overcome droughts and become self-reliant and stable. Similar assistance could be provided to other drought-stricken countries, and it could become a major pillar in Japan’s assistance for peace and stability and for casting off food crisis caused by global warming. At a time when Western countries focus more attention and resources to Russia-Ukraine war, it will be significantly important for Japan to exercise initiative and play a leading role by leveraging the relationship of trust it has built with Middle East and African countries. Peacebuilding is a process that requires engagement over the long term. I would appreciate it if the PT will become a part of that process.

[United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA): Ms. Mariko Sato, Director of Tokyo Office]

Even before the Taliban interim government came to power, we UNFPA have been working to protect the lives and health of Afghan women taking a pragmatic approach. In Afghanistan, one woman is dying every two hours from childbirth or pregnancy complications, often due to lack of reproductive health (RH) care and shortage of trained midwives. Emergency assistance for distribution of supplies (medicine, etc.) had been our focus, but as the situation has now calmed down, we increased our mobile health teams and are providing support to strengthen Family Health Houses (community-based clinics). These activities are extremely effective in reducing maternal deaths to zero. I would also like to report that the UNFPA Afghanistan Country Office recently had a discussion with Karez Health and Educational Services and came to an agreement to work together. With the launch of the PT, we hope that Japan will take the lead in supporting activities in Afghanistan.



[JOICFP: Ms. Sumie Ishii, Chair, and Ms. Hiromi Kusano, Advocacy Consultant]

JOICFP began its activities in Afghanistan in 2002. For over 20 years, we have been providing assistance through “human resource development” in the fields of maternal and child health and education. We have never depended on official development assistance (ODA) for our activities, which are funded by donations from individuals and companies in Japan. We conducted a crowdfunding campaign in the face of critical food shortage for the local people, distributing food packages to 625 households and providing meals at clinics. Based on our performance and trust we have built over the last 20 years, JOICFP is the only NGO that can provide support in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) even under the Taliban interim government. As for educational assistance, we have sent some 260,000 school backpacks used by Japanese children to Afghan children since 2004. Thanks to the availability of the backpacks, it has become commonplace for girls to attend school in some parts of Afghanistan. We hope to continue to promote these community-rooted activities.



© Q&A Session

[Hon. Kuniko Inoguchi]

I think Japan’s experience in land improvement and infrastructure development could also be transferred to Afghanistan. I would also like to know Dr. Higashi’s views on what Japan can do in conflict prevention and resolution as a humanitarian, non-nuclear-weapon state that has made significant financial contributions and on Japan becoming a permanent member of the Security Council. Lastly, the introduction of the Japanese-style school lunch system, which has a proven track record in Africa, may help promote girls’ education and health in Afghanistan, would it not?

[Hon. Hideki Makihara]

I would be interested to know the actual security situation and how safety is being ensured in local activities.



[Hon. Koichiro Gemba]

I would support wider implementation of Dr. Tetsu Nakamura's irrigation system. What is the human rights situation under the Taliban interim government?

[Dr. Higashi]

As for implementing Dr. Tetsu Nakamura's irrigation system across the entire country, it is being promoted by three organizations: JICA, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the Peshawar-kai. I think it will be expanded from the provinces neighboring Nangarhar Province where Dr. Nakamura worked. On the other hand, as we have the textbooks and the Taliban is trumpeting support for agriculture, I expect some will start to call for nationwide implementation. So far, the irrigation system has been about rehabilitation of farmland, but if it expanded nationwide, it will involve the issues of national water management and international rivers. This is an area in which JICA excels, and the next challenge will be how much support should be provided in a systematic way under the Taliban interim government.



As for Security Council reform, I agree that Japan should be part as a non-nuclear-weapon state. Japan lent support to peace and stability in Africa, the Middle East, Afghanistan, South Sudan, among others. Japan has played the role of a global facilitator, and provided concrete assistance in helping people, including agricultural rehabilitation through irrigation and universal health coverage for infectious diseases. It would be good if we could set the tone for other countries to say that having a country like Japan in the Security Council is good for the world. While much attention had focused on financial contributions, our approach should be to accumulate track record on the ground, even though this may take more time



The local security situation has improved dramatically. Most of the citizens can move about freely and carry on with their lives and work. NGOs are finding fewer problems carrying on with their activities. More critical is the political question of at which point the economy should be normalized in relation with the Taliban interim government. As for human rights, it will depend on how you set the standard. Compared with other Middle East countries, for example, the human rights situation is not atypical or anomalous. While respecting local people's decisions on how they want to govern, we can steer them to become more moderate through our interactions with them. In the end, such an approach will be more effective.

[Hon. Kiyoshi Odawara]

As the State Minister for Foreign Affairs, I attended the UN General Assembly in June, where Japan was elected as a non-permanent member of the Security Council for the 12th time. It was the first occasion for a permanent member that exercised its veto power in the Security Council to explain its reasons for doing so. Various proposals have been made for Security Council reform, but no agreement has been reached other than that an explanation will be required for use of the veto. The Security Council does not have the means to stop a permanent member from bombing a neighboring country that has done nothing wrong, but it does function when it comes to conflicts in smaller countries. Japan needs to cooperate closely with other countries and play its role.



[Hon. Keizo Takemi, Executive Director of JPFP]

I gathered from this meeting that it is realistic for Japan to facilitate humanitarian aid in Afghanistan. Our role is to advocate for the government's support for activities of UNFPA, JOICFP and others through the Afghanistan Assistance PT, and I would like to ask the participating parliamentarians to continue to cooperate in these activities.

A request for increasing Japan's contributions to UNFPA and IPPF submitted to Minister of Foreign Affairs and Director-General for Global Issues

On 10 August, Hon. Yoko Kamikawa, Chair of JPFP, Hon. Hitoshi Kikawada, Secretary General of JPFP, and Hon. Ryuhei Kawada, Director of JPFP, submitted to Minister for Foreign Affairs H.E. Yoshimasa Hayashi a formal request for increasing Japan's contributions in the field of population. Prior to that, on 4 August, Hon. Kikawada, together with Ms. Mariko Sato, Director of UNFPA Tokyo Office, and Ms. Sumie Ishii, Chair of JOICFP, submitted the same request to Mr. Takeshi Akahori, Director-General/ Assistant Minister (Ambassador) for Global Issues, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



JPFP Chair Yoko Kamikawa and other MPs hand delivered a letter of request to Minister of Foreign Affairs Hayashi:

[MOFA website] https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/release/press1_001025.html (Japanese)

They also requested that emergency humanitarian assistance be strengthened for UNFPA and IPPF, which work for the prevention of gender-based violence, support for victims, and provision of SRH services, in order to save women's health, dignity, and lives during humanitarian crises in Ukraine and other countries.

1. At the outset, Hon. Kamikawa requested the Japanese government to strengthen its support for the global population and development area and continue to demonstrate its leadership through TICAD8, the G7 Hiroshima Summit and so forth, in light of the current situation in which developing countries, especially in Africa, are facing rapid population growth and challenges related to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) including unintended pregnancy. The parliamentarians also requested the Japanese government to step up its support for UNFPA and IPPF, which are delivering humanitarian response to save women's health, dignity, and lives, including prevention of gender-based violence, support for victims, and provision of SRH services, during humanitarian crises in Ukraine and other countries.
2. Minister Hayashi expressed his appreciation for JPPF's vigorous activities and stated that he would continue to seriously consider Japan's contributions to solving population issues, while listening attentively to the voices on the ground.



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