



# The Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population NEWSLETTER

No. 87 October 2019

## (1) JPPF holds a Joint Committee Meeting

### (2) G20 Okayama Health Ministers' Meeting Official Side Event: "SDGs and Healthy Life Expectancy"

#### (1) JPPF Joint Committee Meeting welcomes Mr. Bjorn Andersson, Regional Director of UNFPA APRO and advisors



UNFPA\* #I March For Campaign

On 7 October, the Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population (JPPF) held a joint committee meeting where they welcomed Mr. Bjorn Andersson, Regional Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Asia-Pacific Regional Office (APRO) and other guests. Following a welcome address by Hon. Ichiro Aisawa,

JPPF Acting Chair, Ms. Mariko Sato, Director of the UNFPA Tokyo Office, briefed attendants on the UNFPA's plans to reinforce the areas of ageing population and humanitarian response, and she spoke about the prominent work of Japanese physicians Dr. Rintaro Mori and Dr. Tomoko Kurokawa as advisors for APRO.

Mr. Andersson then started his presentation by stating that, as future initiatives of UNFPA APRO, humanitarian response is becoming more and more important given the natural disasters, climate change, conflicts and other problems, especially in countries such as Bangladesh, Myanmar and Afghanistan. He also indicated that efforts were needed to address emerging issues such as declining birthrate and ageing population and also the imbalance in gender ratios at birth due to artificial abortions, which were particularly noticeable in East and South Asia. He also stated that the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25 in November would not only take up the "three zeros," which UNFPA has been striving for (zero preventable maternal deaths, zero unmet needs for contraception, and zero gender-based violence and harmful practices), but also would review the unfinished business of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) over the past 25 years. Mr. Andersson also indicated that the Summit planned to take up issues of developed countries such as declining birthrates and ageing populations as well as global warming. In addition, he expressed his appreciation for the support of the Japanese government and people and his hope for receiving financial support in the future, as well as technical support by engaging in discussions such as this.

Dr. Rintaro Mori, Regional Advisor on Population Ageing and Sustainable Development of UNFPA APRO, stated that he would like to direct efforts at sharing Japan's experience and expertise with other Asian countries. Dr. Tomoko Kurokawa, Regional Humanitarian Advisor of UNFPA APRO, expressed her gratitude for Japan's support in the area of protecting women's human rights in Myanmar and other countries. Dr. Osamu Kusumoto, Executive Director/Secretary General of APDA, commented that APDA has survey-based research results including the gender ratio imbalance in South Asia, and would be very happy if the UNFPA would make use of these.

In the following discussion, Hon. Asahiko Mihara, JPPF Director, began by stating, "I do not believe the earth has a future unless we tackle the issue of the world's growing population. While education is contributing to a greater

understanding of the importance of women's rights to choose, there is a need for further efforts". Hon. Yukio Ubukata commented that while improving the quality of education will help address population issues, there is still a gap in achievement of women's rights, and efforts must be made to fill that gap. Hon. Hiroyuki Moriyama expressed the opinion that while there are good practices which Japan can share with other countries, Japan needs to learn from other countries when it comes to women's rights. Hon. Shintaro Ito posed a question about an optimum population and, in response, Dr. Kusumoto noted, "If we are in a situation where we can make well-informed choices, it is understood that as a rule of thumb, the birthrate will fall below the replacement level. This is why the ICPD agreed to not to decide on the optimum population. In this light, preventing unwanted pregnancies will result in solving population issues".

Hon. Hideki Makihara spoke about his interest in education in Sweden, a country that produced people like Ms. Greta Thunberg as well as Mr. Andersson, and stated that he wanted to support the global movement of young people voicing their opinions. Hon. Teruhiko Mashiko, JFPF Vice-Chair, concluded the discussion by saying that he would like to respond to expectations for Japan to demonstrate a new model in the world for the issues of declining birthrate and ageing population. As a final comment, Hon. Aisawa stated, "In recent years, few people, particularly those of the younger generation, have the experience of being at the bedside of relatives during the final days of their lives. Through such experiences, we appreciate the importance of life, value it, and sense our connections. These feelings enable people to celebrate new life and, therefore, may lead to improvement in the declining birthrate somewhat. Right now, it may perhaps be necessary for us to go back to the initial philosophy".

## **(2) G20 Okayama Health Ministers' Meeting Official Side Event: "SDGs and Healthy Life Expectancy" in Okayama City**

On 17 October, the Asian Population and Development Association (APDA), which serves as the Secretariat of JFPF, held a public seminar entitled "SDGs and Healthy Life Expectancy" to commemorate the G20 Health Ministers' Meeting in Okayama at Okayama University's J Hall under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Promotion Council for Support of G20 Health Ministers' Meeting, and Okayama University.

As lecturers, the seminar welcomed Dr. Kiyoshi Kurokawa, Professor Emeritus of the University of Tokyo and Professor Emeritus of the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS), together with Dr. Mitsunobu Kano, Professor of the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Graduate School of Interdisciplinary Science and Engineering in Health Systems at Okayama University. During the seminar, both lecturers exchanged views on what kind of measures should be put in place for addressing the issue of ageing population in efforts to achieve the SDGs, and what role universities should play in this process. They also raised issues concerning innovation and harm reduction strategies, and discussed the importance of scientific initiatives including data collection for evidence-based decision-making.



At the opening of the seminar, Dr. Osamu Kusumoto, Executive Director/Secretary General of APDA, greeted the audience and introduced APDA and its work in supporting parliamentary activities in population and development. He explained that it is important to realize a healthy society in the face of population ageing while reducing the social burden in order to achieve the SDGs and that thinking about this issue from a broad perspective was the purpose of the seminar.

As a moderator, Mr. Kohei Onozaki, Board Member of Health and Global Policy Institute (HGPI), continued by saying, "Although the declining birth rate is considered a problem in Japan, society cannot be sustained amidst a population with ongoing growth. Therefore, it can be said that Japan, the country with the most aging population in the world, is at a new stage in terms of achieving sustainable development." What is important, he noted, was not the size of a country's GDP but the condition of individuals living in that country, and that while some people mourned the decline in Japan's economic influence due to its contracting population, per capita GDP had hardly decreased. Like human

beings, he argued, countries also have life cycles, and while Japan may already have become a nation in decline, he raised the issue as to whether Japan could contribute to sustainable development.

**【Lecture】** *Dr. Mitsunobu Kano, Professor of the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Graduate School of Interdisciplinary Science and Engineering in Health Systems at Okayama University (Science and Technology Co-Advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan)*

Dr. Kano explained Okayama University's initiatives for the SDGs and stressed that a university, rather than a place for gaining knowledge, is a place for acquiring capabilities in tackling unknown problems. He spoke about his personal experience of feeling unable as a clinical physician to care for patients with untreatable disease, and how he discovered new possibilities for the treatment of intractable pancreatic cancer by commencing research in basic medical sciences by questioning "why".



Stressing that questioning "why" is the cornerstone of science, he explained that science, based on decisions by "fast thinking" (which is intuitive), and backed by "slow thinking" (which is logical), is about making knowledge reproducible. This, he said, enables the sharing of knowledge and advancement of technology, which can improve the well-being of people.

**【Lecture】** *Dr. Kiyoshi Kurokawa, Professor Emeritus of the University of Tokyo and Professor Emeritus of GRIPS*



Dr. Kurokawa presented photographs of Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Jeff Bezos, and Mark Zuckerberg as people who drastically changed the world in just the past 20 years and, in contrast, listed the problems confronting Japan during the same period, such as the nuclear plant disaster in Fukushima. Likewise, he pointed out that the old values of the older generation were preventing social reform. He also indicated that the major cause of death in the world had shifted from infectious diseases of the past to non-communicable diseases (NCDs) including lifestyle diseases. In addition, he discussed how dementia had also become a major health issue with the ageing of

the population and that, unlike other diseases to date, there were no techniques or criteria for measuring the extent of the disease or effectiveness of treatments, thus putting us in a difficulty in applying scientific methods for clear standardization

To achieve the SDGs by responding to major changes in society including the population ageing, technological innovation is necessary. Therefore, the mission of university education is not only to simply provide knowledge but also to help students find questions and investigate and verify solutions using scientific methods, and make intellectual contributions. This process will generate new ideas and possibilities. Dr. Kurokawa concluded his speech by encouraging young people to go out into the world, experience it first hand, and pave their own way to the future.

**【Panel Discussion】**

With Mr. Onozaki acting as the moderator, Dr. Kurokawa and Dr. Kano then engaged in a panel discussion in the form of a question and answer session where they addressed questions from participants. One participant raised an issue of innovations creating new forms of addictions and health hazards, such as smartphones that are rapidly gaining popularity and e-cigarettes that are reported by international media. In response, the panelists explained that the verification of cost effectiveness was also important in the health reforms the SDGs were aiming for, and that harm reduction strategies were useful as the countermeasures for



additions. To make them effective, Dr. Kano maintained that a scientific response including the collection of data to determine the risks was essential.

Dr. Kurokawa also added, “The process of trial and error is necessary for innovation to be adopted and effectively applied in society, and only wisdom derived in this way will become the driving force in achieving a sustainable, inclusive society”. In addition, he commented that harm reduction strategies also required scientific trial-and-error learning that could be accepted in Japanese society.

The seminar was attended by approximately 80 people in total. These included attendants from Okayama University, local medical personnel, representatives of private companies, and young delegates from the Philippines and Mexico who were participating in the International Youth Development Program of the International Youth Exchange Program sponsored by the Cabinet Office. With many questions forthcoming from attendants, the seminar proved to be a valuable opportunity for advocacy from global viewpoints in tandem with the G20 Okayama Health Ministers’ Meeting.

\*\*\*\*\*

For back issues, please visit: <http://www.apda.jp/en/index.html>

