



The Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population

NEWS LETTER

No.97 August 2020

Interview with JPPF Chair Hon. Yoko Kamikawa

Introduction

In December 2019, Hon. Yoko Kamikawa (Member of the House of Representatives, former Minister of Justice) assumed the post of the 7th Chair of the Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population (JPPF). For this issue, we interviewed Hon. Kamikawa on her thoughts after having being in the post now for more than six months, future direction of JPPF's activities, and the relation between JPPF and "sustainable development," with which she has been involved as Chair of the Liberal Democratic Party's Parliamentarian League on SDGs Diplomacy. (Covered in this issue are excerpts from the interview. The full text will appear in the Autumn 2020 Issue of the *Population and Development*, a quarterly of the Asian Population and Development Association (APDA)).

— Today, we would like to hear your candid thoughts on the direction you would like to guide the JPPF.

Hon. Kamikawa: JPPF is a supra-party parliamentary caucus established in 1974. JPPF's first chair was former prime minister Nobusuke Kishi, the second chair was former prime minister Takeo Fukuda, the third chair was former foreign minister Shintaro Abe, the fourth chair was former foreign minister Taro Nakayama, the fifth chair was former prime minister Yasuo Fukuda, and the sixth chair was former justice minister Sadakazu Tanigaki. All of these distinguished figures have left their mark in the history of constitutional politics in Japan.



When I was contacted for the post of the 7th Chair of JPPF last December, it was intimated to me that there was a strong expectation to have a woman parliamentarian for this top post. Even though I am still training myself as a politician, I made a leap of faith by accepting the offer in part for the sake of other women parliamentarians who will come after me. JPPF has a history and tradition of leading Japan's diplomacy in the international community. At a time when global solidarity is needed in addressing a range of difficult challenges, I am resolved to do my best in exercising new leadership.

— In 1974, the year in which JPPF was established, you were still a university student.

Hon. Kamikawa: In 1974, I was studying international relations at a university. At that time, *The Limits to Growth*, published from the Club of Rome, grabbed public attention in Japan as well as in other countries, and there was a real sense that population explosion mostly happening in the developing world was an imminent threat. How can we stabilize exponential growth in world population? Failure to control it would make it impossible to build a peaceful and sustainable society on this planet. I have heard that JPPF was established out of such a sense of crisis.



Mr. Nobusuke Kishi
Former Prime Minister
1974~1979



Mr. Takeo Fukuda
Former Prime Minister
1979~1990



Mr. Shintaro Abe
Former Minister of
Foreign Affairs
1990~1991



Dr. Taro Nakayama
Former Minister of
Foreign Affairs
1991~2007



Mr. Yasuo Fukuda
Former Prime Minister
2007~2012



Mr. Sadakazu Tanigaki
Former Minister of
Justice
2013~2017

At a time when a globally-minded nonpartisan parliamentary caucus was something uncommon in Japan a half century ago, JPPF was established as the first group in the world with a platform for “sustainable development”. The aim was to have elected parliamentarians listen to the voices of the people independent from the government or international organizations, and promote diplomacy in direct solidarity with parliamentarians in other countries. I believe that we should continue to uphold such foresight of JPPF as our guiding principle.

— It was the activities of JPPF that helped to gradually give shape to parliamentary activities on population and development around the world. What are your thoughts on this point?

Hon. Kamikawa: In 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted at the United Nations General Assembly with the agreement of 193 countries. As you may know, the basic concept of “sustainable development” became well-known when it was expounded in “*Our Common Future*”, the final report published by the UN’s World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1987. WCED is also known as Brundtland Commission because it was chaired by the then Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland. However, it is not well known that it was Japan that proposed the establishment of WCED and that provided the funding and initiated concrete action for its establishment. It was established because former prime minister Takeo Fukuda, the 2nd chair of JPPF, made the proposal to the whole world. In that sense, there would have been no SDGs without the activities of JPPF.

JPPF and AFPPD

JPPF, as the world’s first supra-partisan parliamentary caucus on population and development, not only promotes exchange of views, organizes study meetings, and raises issues in Japan, but it has also taken the initiative around the world in promoting cooperation with other parliamentary caucuses in other countries and regions to address these issues. In particular, JPPF has supported the establishment of parliamentary forums on population and development in various regions of the world to address these issues in a way that is tailored for each regional context, and has assisted in their networking to facilitate parliamentary activities. In Asia, JPPF has led the establishment of the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD) in 1982. The successive chairpersons of the AFPPD have been served by executive members of JPPF.

AFPPD convenes meetings of the general assembly and standing committees formed around major themes, and organizes a range of parliamentary activities that have made significant contribution in legislation and awareness-raising activities in Asian countries. For these accomplishments, AFPPD was awarded the United Nations Population Award in 2010.

AFPPD will, in collaboration with JPPF and APDA, which is the secretariat for JPPF and provisional secretariat for AFPPD, organize a variety of programs this year.



[Global Conference of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (GCPPD) co-hosted by JPPF and AFPPD in Tokyo at the time of G7 Ise-Shima Summit in 2016]

— Compared with the last half a century, what do you think about the position of Japan in the international community today?

Hon. Kamikawa: It was our predecessors who developed the principles underlying JPPF’s activities and who made JPPF’s achievements possible. These are invaluable assets in terms of soft power in Japan’s diplomacy. And even though Japan’s ODA is decreasing and we are seeing the rise of emerging economies, Japan’s presence in terms of soft power is increasing. I will make efforts towards letting the wider public know how much Japan has contributed to the international community.

We are living in difficult times, but it is essentially the role of politicians to find hope in times of difficulty. The philosopher Alain once said, “Pessimism comes from the temperament, optimism from the will”. The role of politics is not to get caught up in negativity but to face the challenges squarely, plot the path to resolving the challenges, and take concrete action with hope. I think as long as we maintain this attitude in politics, we can inspire hope and bring about a better society.

— Lastly, can we have a few words on how we can create a hopeful society?

Hon. Kamikawa: Japan is facing a decline in population due to low fertility and population ageing at a level unprecedented in human history. The situation surrounding each of us individuals is also becoming increasingly difficult. In such an age, we can appreciate “being together with others” more than ever before. After the Sumatra Earthquake and the Great East Japan Earthquake, words of encouragement and support and relief materials poured in from all over the world to help the victims. From the beginning of this year, a new type of coronavirus (COVID-19) unknown to humankind spread around the world, which is calling for our collective wisdom in the development of vaccines and drugs, establishment of treatment protocols, and information sharing.

These are times when we need, more than anything else, to help and support each other on a global scale. In terms of mutual global support, the role of parliamentarian activities is also changing. Whereas our role in the past was to pass on Japan’s experience to developing countries, we need now to form partnerships with governments, companies, and civil society, both in developed and developing countries, and bring our collective wisdom to bear in achieving SDG17. In this context, we hope to look to the past activities of JPPF for clues in building this new era, expand our network of partners, set new agenda for population, and further our activities. This requires the active involvement of JPPF members. To gain our members’ understanding and support for JPPF’s past and future activities, I vouch to engage deeply in policy dialogue and to translate our policies into concrete action.

— Hon. Kamikawa, thank you very much.



[Mr. Draper visits Japan in 1970 to request Japan’s contribution for the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (courtesy of JOICFP)]

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

