

JFPF celebrated its 46th anniversary this year. In an age when global solidarity is needed to address various difficult issues, JFPF is expected to play an increasingly important role as a parliamentarian caucus with history and tradition of leading Japan's diplomacy in the international community.

In the future issues of JFPF Newsletter, we will carry "JFPF Column" on activities and initiatives related to population and development undertaken by JFPF members.

JFPF Column:

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- Hon. Karen Makishima, Member of the House of Representatives
- Hon. Masahiro Ishida, Member of the House of Councillors

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[Editorial responsibility: JFPF secretariat]

JFPF Column



Hon. Asahiko Mihara

Member of the House of Representatives

In my many years' involvement in issues related to Africa, I have come to think that the most essential things are eradication of poverty, availability of nutritious meals and sanitary water, and education.

Among Japan's various activities for international cooperation, JICA's Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) is one of the projects that provide assistance in a more tangible way. The JOCV volunteers work with the local people to address issues faced by developing countries. I support their activities, including by actually visiting the sites of JOCV activities. These activities may seem like a drop in the bucket, but the local people truly appreciate our assistance in rural development, maternal and child health, and other grass-root technical assistance.

For example, agricultural technical transfer from Japan has enabled them to grow a set of crops in the dry season and a different set of crops in the rainy season. The use of furrows in the field has increased yield, resulting in improvement in their living standards. In Ghana, the Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research (NMIMR) was established with

the support of the Government of Japan. Researchers at NMIMR, who studied in Japan, are fully utilizing the expertise and facilities accumulated to fight COVID-19.

Some have voiced skepticism about international cooperation at a time when Japan faces its own problems. But when we see the local people in much worse situation, we, as people born under the same sun, need to lend a helping hand to try to make everyone more prosperous. This kind of "compassion" and "sincerity" is important. Whether we are recipient or provider of aid, we need to be able to place ourselves in the other people's shoes. I think this kind of basic principle is embedded in Japan's international cooperation.

My hometown of Kitakyushu City is facing a population decline. The city used to support Japan's industrial development as a part of the four major industrial regions in Japan. With the contraction of the industry, the population of 1.05 million has decreased to 950,000 today, and is expected to decline further. We are working with the government in promoting an offshore wind power project, which is expected to lead to employment creation. I think it is important for us to be flexible, using not only infrastructures from the heavy industry but also information technology to create new industries.

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Hon. Karen Makishima

Member of the House of Representatives

Surrounded by nature with its mountains, rivers, and the sea, my constituency (Kanagawa Prefecture's 17th electoral district) is facing the effects of population decline, low fertility and population ageing, especially in issues related to health and nursing care services, education, and parenting support.

Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population (JPFP)

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Meanwhile, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, we are flexibly implementing measures that are suited to the local situation.

In terms of education, due to relatively smaller classes, we can afford to distribute tablets to all students at schools, and teachers can pay attention to detail in their instruction to students.

In terms of employment, the concept of “workation” has drawn much attention lately. Leveraging the advantages our community has in being located near Tokyo and having many hot springs, we believe we can increase the number of people who settle in our community if in addition to tourists and visitors, we can increase the number of people who are in one or another loosely “associated” with our community.

As for measures for community development, we have introduced the Special Approval School System to enable students to attend schools from outside of their designated school districts. The

system has also prompted schools to develop new distinguishing features in education. Involvement of children from outside school districts has had an effect to revitalize local communities with various new ideas, such as involving more children in local festivals.

As for parliamentary legislation related to the issue of population, we have been discussing at the Women’s Affairs Division, which is a national organization within the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), legislation of a comprehensive law on women’s health for the last several years. As a person in charge, I drafted the outlines of the law and presented it to Hon. Seiko Hashimoto, Minister in charge of Women’s Empowerment, and Hon. Fumio Kishida, Chair of the Policy Research Council of LDP, in July. I believe that this law will provide a very important foundation for women to fulfill their potential in society.

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Hon. Masahiro Ishida

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The spread of COVID-19 has increased the burden on health care professionals. The ratio of nurses, physicians and other health care workers to the population is comparatively lower in Japan than in other countries, and it is only through the tireless devotion of these health care professionals that enables provision of affordable care anywhere in Japan. I have been working to ameliorate this situation. It requires a mechanism to facilitate reemployment of health care workers, stability in hospital management, and securing an adequate number of nursing students.

Actually the number of nurses and physicians is increasing, but their workload is further growing partly due to

population ageing. With the COVID-19 pandemic, moreover, they are facing shortage of workforce and supplies as well as unjustified discrimination directed at them. On the other hand, there are many people who have expressed kind words about health care workers under the current situation.

Against this backdrop, it was encouraging to hear the news that in a survey of senior high school students across Japan this year, “nurse” was chosen as the most popular occupation among senior high school girls.

As population ageing advances in Japan, I think we need to change the age-based definition of the “elderly”. This definition stems from the United Nations’ publication in 1956 that held that “ageing society is one in which more than 7% of the population is over the age of 65”. At that time, the average male life expectancy in Japan was around 64. Fifty years on, the average life expectancy in Japan is now around 81 for men and 87 for women, making the definition incongruous with today’s realities.

Therefore, I am proposing to define the “elderly” not by their age but by their need for nursing care or support. There are many people over 65 who are healthy and motivated to work. Companies should change the conception that one has to work a set number of hours to count as a full-time worker, introduce job-based employment where jobs are divided into smaller tasks, and create an environment in which those willing to work, regardless of age, can find modes of work suited to them.

If we can change the definition of the elderly and people’s mindset, we can begin to see ageing less as something to lament about, but more in the context that “longevity is something to be joyous about and a cause for celebration”. I hope to widely spread these ideas and initiate a major transformation from Japan.

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News

The Online Regional Parliamentarians’ Meetings on ICPD25 Follow-Up and COVID-19 Impact

In September, the Asian Population and Development Association (APDA), which serves as the secretariat of JPFP, organized, with the support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), two online regional parliamentarians’ meetings on the topic of ICPD25 Follow-Up and Impact of COVID-19.

On **September 15**, 24 parliamentarians from 14 countries mainly from the Arab region participated. Hon. Marwan Al-Hmoud (MP from Jordan), Secretary General of the Forum of Arab Parliamentarians on Population and Development (FAPPD), and Dr. Luay Shabaneh, Regional Director for UNFPA Arab States Regional Office (ASRO), gave opening addresses. This was followed by active exchange of opinions on the progress made and challenges related to the ICPD25 Commitments, with a focus mainly on Morocco and Palestine. In closing, Hon. Dr. Reda Khawaldeh (MP from Jordan) and Ms. Ghada Diab at UNFPA ASRO, gave a summary of the meeting and thanked the participants.



On **September 17**, more than 40 persons, including parliamentarians as well as representatives from National Committees on Population and Development (NCs) and the civil society, participated from more than 15 countries mainly in the Asia region. Hon. Yoko Kamikawa, Chair of JPFP, was scheduled to give the opening address, but she could not attend due to her nomination as Minister of Justice the previous day. Her message was read out by the secretariat. In the sessions that followed, Mr. Davide De Beni, health economist at UNFPA Asia and the Pacific Regional Office (APRO), made a presentation on the socio-economic effect of COVID-19, Ms. Hadley Rose gave a presentation on case studies in Sri Lanka and Laos, and Ms. Meirinda Sebayang, representing Jaringan Indonesia Positif, which is a member organization of the cooperating organization APCASO, delivered a speech on the role of the civil society.

In the discussions, it was confirmed that discussions were needed to ensure sufficient response on the issues of population, sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and gender-based violence (GBV) during the COVID-19 pandemic in partnership between parliamentarians and civil society. Ms. Kamma Blair at UNFPA APRO and Dr. Osamu Kusumoto, Secretary General and Executive Director of APDA, gave closing remarks.

Video link: <https://www.apda.jp/en/moviephoto.html>



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