



## The Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population

# NEWS LETTER

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### JPPF Joint Committee Meeting / APDA Seminar “Challenges of Population Ageing”

**Speaker: Professor Kiyoshi Kurokawa, Professor Emeritus of the  
National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies**

The Asian Population and Development Association (APDA), which acts as the JPPF Secretariat, held a seminar on 4 September with JPPF’s cooperation on the topic of “Challenges of Population Ageing”, in the Multipurpose Hall of the 1st Members’ Office Building of the House of Representatives. The speaker was Professor Kiyoshi Kurokawa, Professor Emeritus of the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS), Chair of the Health and Global Policy Institute (HGPE), and a former President of the Science Council of Japan.



More than 40 people braved the unfortunate weather to attend the seminar, where they were welcomed with an opening address by Hon. Yasuo Fukuda, a former Prime Minister of Japan and Chair of APDA and Honorary Chair of JPPF. In his address Hon. Fukuda noted that 36 years ago when APDA was founded, the fear foremost in the world’s mind was of exploding population numbers, and reining in that runaway growth was APDA’s focus. Today the issues surrounding population represent different challenges for different countries: in Japan’s case, the question of population involves the advanced state of its extremely low fertility and population ageing, along with the need to tackle the issues that those phenomena bring in their wake. Expressing a hope that younger people would also take a greater interest in these issues, Hon. Fukuda said he looked forward to what insightful ideas Professor Kurokawa would present, as a leading scientific scholar in this country, for Japan to make it through this particular period of its history, and what proposals he would make for shifting people’s thinking on this issue.



Professor Kurokawa began his speech by first acknowledging that an “ageing society” was inherently a good thing. He said it was important for Japan, and especially Tokyo as a “metropolis of longevity”, to continue to represent a model to the world for ageing societies. Turning next to the principal problems that Japan faces today, Professor Kurokawa listed these as a stagnating domestic economy, the insecurity afflicting many Japanese people, and the country’s education system.

On the issue of Japan’s economic performance, around 20 years ago Japan was one of the world’s top three nations for GDP per capita. Today however Japan has fallen to 27th or 28th, and it is experiencing increasing wealth inequalities. One consequence relating to that decline is that differences are also showing up in the levels of people’s health. Lastly Professor Kurokawa pointed to rising gloom among the Japanese as they become aware of the increasing cost to society of the medical and pensions bill that an aging society will entail, and are confronted with a constant series of scandals involving politicians, companies, government officials, and academic institutions.

Professor Kurokawa then went on to discuss the current situation concerning the costs to society of an ageing population. He said that in an aging society, a certain percentage of the population will inevitably come to have dementia. Putting a figure on the cost of that, currently it accounts for 3.2-3.5% of Japan’s GDP of around 500 trillion Yen, or between 14.5-15.5 trillion Yen. While around 60% of that figure is formally included when calculating GDP in the form of medical and aged care costs, the remaining 40% represents costs to society that are not included in the calculation of GDP, principally the cost incurred by families providing informal care for their relatives. The burden of that “hidden” cost is borne more often by women, and in addition, in any age cohort women are at greater risk of being diagnosed with dementia than men. Professor Kurokawa said that from now on

it will be very important to use AI to analyze big data on dementia and the measures for caring for it, and he alluded to a new potential option in the form of a fusion of neuroscience and digital technology.

In the Q&A session that followed, one attendee asked what the principal reason was for the considerable difficulty that had arisen in introducing the AI and robots out into actual health care facilities that would help them with their labor shortages, even though Japan clearly already had an aged population. Another asked that despite the creation of nursing care strategic special zones and of a scheme to allow nursing care facilities to rent advanced technological equipment on very favorable terms, out of a fear of the new there has been very little take-up of these initiatives out in the field, so he posed a question as to what can be done to get people to embrace such innovations. Professor Kurokawa pointed to harm done in this regard by parties including government bureaucracies that have been more concerned about protecting their fiefdoms, and he said it was fundamental for all involved to take a broader view of the issue as a whole. He also said that while it was important to be able to think about and act on an issue by oneself and learn by overcoming many failures and setbacks in the process, by contrast he pointed to a problem with Japan's education system, whereby its focus on teaching to the test means that students may well acquire acquaintance with certain facts, but that does not amount to true knowledge.

One attendee noted that when it comes to building a platform between industry, government, academia and the private sector, there is resistance among academics to cooperating with industry. That attendee called on Professor Kurokawa to help guide the direction for raising the quality of such a platform for measures to deal with various issues including dementia, through collaboration with industry. Another attendee said that they thought the time had come when it was again important for policies to be developed using a scientific approach; for example, they said, it has been fully scientifically verified that cigarettes are harmful to health, and it is therefore evident that it is important to eradicate cigarette smoking. However some scientists can be criticized by their fellow scientists for merely mentioning the expression "harm reduction" in connection with cigarette smoking, a situation that is not helpful for free and open discussion of any matter. This attendee asked Professor Kurokawa to inform the meeting what options Japan would need in order for policies to be created on the basis of scientific data. Professor Kurokawa replied "the problem is first, that academics only ever deal with government bureaucrats, and second, how universities think is different to how business and industry thinks. I think there are barriers to their doing things together, but I do think it is important that they do work together, as is how they do work together. For that reason I think that universities should clearly express whatever views they hold that are different from industry's".

Next, Professor Kurokawa explained the origins of the term "sustainable development", which dates from the Brundtland Report prepared by the World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission) launched by the United Nations in 1984, and the Rio Declaration from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio Declaration (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, which was heavily influenced by the Brundtland Report. Professor Kurokawa issued a rallying call to the students in attendance, saying that in order to realize the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), "it is not governments but you all as individuals who are to think about these goals. Thinking about how to act will constitute wisdom, and I want you to take action, even if just a single step or two, without fear of failure".



Lastly, Dr. Osamu Kusumoto, APDA Secretary-General / Executive Director who moderated the seminar, expressed his thanks to Professor Kurokawa for his lecture, which can be seen as strong encouragement for the young people who will be responsible for society in the future. Adding a final observation, Dr. Kusumoto noted that the Brundtland Commission, which introduced the concept of "sustainable development", was set up after former Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda and other political leaders of Japan at the time, who were aware of what was at stake with respect to the global environment and population, lobbied the United Nations through Japan's Permanent Mission there. It was Japan that lobbied to set up this Commission, and it is unfortunate that not many people around the world know that it was this ground-breaking Commission that gave rise to the SDGs. Dr. Kusumoto said it was important for Japan to properly make people aware of the outcomes to date that it has achieved.

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