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International Conference on Investing in Youth “Leaving No One Behind” Astana, Kazakhstan

On October 19-20, the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Ministry of Social Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and the Asian Population and Development Association (APDA) co-hosted the International Conference on Investing in Youth “Leaving No One Behind” in Astana, the capital of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) supported the conference through the Japan Trust Fund (JTF).

As a result of progress made in demographic transition, the global population of youth between 10 and 24 is the highest at any time in history. Youth investment forms the core of the World Bank’s Human Capital Project, which seeks to strengthen countries’ investment in human capital. The conference was organized based on the awareness that investing in youth today is critical for building a peaceful, inclusive, sustainable, and economically vibrant society.



Parliamentarians, ministers, experts, and representatives from UN organizations, the academia, private sector, and NGOs, totaling some 200, from 35 countries of the Asia-Pacific region as well as the Arab region, Africa, and Europe attended the event. From Japan, H.E. Yasuo Fukuda (the Former Prime Minister of Japan, Chair of APDA, and Honorary Chair of JPPF), Hon. Keizo Takemi (Chair of AFPPD and Executive Director of JPPF), Hon. Ichiro Aisawa (Acting Chair of JPPF), and Hon. Karen Makishima (Vice-Chair of the Gender Issues Committee of JPPF) took part.

At the opening ceremony, H.E. Nurlan Nigmatulin, Speaker of the Mazhilis of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan, delivered the welcome speech, followed by opening remarks by H.E. Fukuda. H.E. Fukuda explained how vigorous investment in education by Japan, which had limited natural resources, resulted in building the foundation for Japan’s development. At a time when epochal progress in science and technology is anticipated, including AI singularity, H.E. Fukuda pointed to a vision for a system of education and training focusing less on rote learning of knowledge but more on encouraging curiosity and imagination of young people.

He said, “All of us here were once young. We had our aspirations and dreams but also experienced various hardships. It would be wonderful if we could return to our youth, but since that is not possible, it is our mission for us living today to invest actively in and support young people so that they do not have to face the same hardships and difficulties that we did”.



On behalf of the Japanese Government, H.E. Ichiro Kawabata, the Japanese Ambassador to the Republic of Kazakhstan, congratulated all for the conference, and remarked that it was an honor to contribute to this important event through financial assistance.

In Session 1: “Expanding Opportunities for Education and Employment of Youth and Improving Linkages and Transitions”, it was stressed that while past experience does not always serve to address today’s challenges, there was a need to try new approaches.

In Session 2: “Improving Health and Well-being of Youth through Universal Access to Health Information, Education and Services”, Hon. Takemi, the Session Chair, emphasized that giving young people knowledge and information about health and access to appropriate health services they need provides the foundation for addressing the issues of population through achievement of reproductive health (RH) services, which will provide vigor to the new era.



In the discussion that followed, Hon. Makishima proposed countries to undertake discussions on the issue of women athletes’ health towards the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. Many were touched when she spoke about how young people’s volunteer activities for disaster relief led to social and political participation.

In Session 3: “Promoting Full Participation of Youth in Civil, Political and Social Affairs”, a presentation was made on efforts to stimulate young people’s interest in politics and nurture the next generation of political leaders.

In Session 4: “Opportunities and Risks for Youth in the context of Globalization”, H.E. Hiroshi Takahashi (Special Assistant to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan and former Japanese Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan) gave a presentation titled, “Young Generation and Agriculture - Cross-Border Regional Cooperation”, in which he illustrated the use of Japan’s traditional agricultural method to turn the barren Gamberi Desert in Afghanistan into a fertile land, restoring the foundation for food production. He explained the importance of focusing on the practicalities of securing food and giving employment to the youth by generating interest in the field of agriculture in less developed countries through youth investment.

In response to a presentation by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Hon. Aisawa asked the role of IOM in addressing the issues of refugees who are forced to flee, voluntary migrants, and other migrants who are somewhere in the middle between refugees and voluntary migrants. Ms. Jill Helke, Department Director at IOM, replied, “The mission of IOM is to support people who are migrating. We are not operating based on differences in definition between refugees and voluntary migrants, but to deal with issues faced by people who are migrating. Even though support of IOM for refugees is limited, our basic policy, at any rate, is to enhance resilience of migrants”. Lastly, a summary of the conference’s discussions was presented, and the outcome document was adopted.

In the closing statement, Hon. Takemi expressed appreciation to the Parliament of Kazakhstan and the Government of Kazakhstan for their effort in hosting the conference. He noted that timing of demographic dividend will be different in countries in Asia and that this should be leveraged to promote regional development and achieve the SDGs. He also touched on the issue of youth poverty and said that even though problems faced by countries are different, politicians have a common responsibility to deal with the issue. He stressed the need for the world to unite towards achieving the SDGs.

The conference was one of the largest parliamentary conferences on youth investment not only in Central Asia but also in whole of the Asia-Pacific region.

