

Established in 1974, JPPF is the world's first supra-partisan parliamentary group on population and development.

In an age when global solidarity is needed to address various challenges, JPPF is expected to play an increasingly important role as a parliamentary caucus with a long history and tradition of leading Japan's diplomacy in the international community.

In every issue of JPPF Newsletter, we will carry "JPPF Column" and "News" on activities and initiatives related to population and development issues.

## News:

- *JPPF Study Meeting on "The Humanitarian Crisis in Afghanistan and the Role of Japan"*
- *Hybrid Meeting on Nairobi Commitments Follow-up under COVID-19*

[Editorial responsibility: JPPF secretariat]

## News

### JPPF Study Meeting on "The Humanitarian Crisis in Afghanistan and the Role of Japan"

On 8 December, the Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population (JPPF) organized a study meeting on the topic, "The Humanitarian Crisis in Afghanistan and the Role of Japan". The meeting was moderated by Hon. Hitoshi Kikawada, Secretary-General of JPPF. Dr. Daisaku Higashi of Sophia University, who had been involved in the peace process as a team leader for reconciliation issues for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), was invited to speak as a lecturer. Dr. Khaled Reshad, the founder and Executive Director of Karez Health and Educational Services, a Japanese certified non-profit organization providing medical and education support in Afghanistan, was asked to give a report.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### [Summary of the Opening Address by Hon. Yoko Kamikawa, Chair of JPPF]



With the fall of Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, on 15 August, the Taliban took control of the country. We feel that it is urgent that we do something for the imperiled Afghan people. At the same time, we have to answer the tough question of how to ensure that our aid is used effectively. Under these difficult circumstances, we want to know how we can provide effective assistance and what concrete options we have in saving the lives of the Afghan people.

#### [Summary of Lecture by Dr. Daisaku Higashi of Sophia University]

After the Taliban came to power, Western countries suspended aid to Afghanistan. Economic sanctions imposed by the West have impacted women and children, the most vulnerable members of society, the hardest. As a result, millions could die during this harsh winter, including by starvation. This may draw severe criticism from China and Russia, which may argue that the deaths are the result of democratic countries suspending aid to the Taliban because the Taliban is not a democratic regime. It could erode trust in the democratic system internationally.



Today's Afghanistan is much a product of foreign intervention. Before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Kabul was one of the most advanced cities in the region and was considered as a must-see among backpackers from the West. Later, the West provided large supplies of arms to the mujahideen (religious fighters) to counter the Soviet Union.

It was this ample supply of arms that led to the civil war after the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan ultimately had a significant impact also on the Soviet Union itself, leading to the collapse of the regime. Ironically, after the Taliban came to power, the number of deaths and injuries from conflict has decreased substantially in Afghanistan. This clearly shows that the past conflict was waged between the Taliban on one hand and the Afghan forces with international military support on the other.

The government forces, which were regarded as overwhelmingly superior to the Taliban forces in terms of the size of their troops and arms, were easily brought down for several reasons. For one, many of their soldiers were drug users. The number of troops was also inflated so that they could obtain more assistance from the West. Widespread corruption within the government led to loss of support from the people.

**Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population (JFPF)**

Established 1 April, 1974

Chair: Hon. Yoko Kamikawa (7th Chair)

Membership: 72 (As of 27 December 2021)


Secretariat: Asian Population and Development Association (APDA)

TEL: +81-3-5405-8844

FAX: +81-3-5405-8845

E-mail: [apda@apda.jp](mailto:apda@apda.jp)

Website: <http://www.apda.jp>

Back numbers are available from this link 

<https://www.apda.jp/en/topics.html>

The Taliban has adopted a rather pragmatic policy since coming to power, and has shown willingness to cooperate with regard to humanitarian aid. In this context, an organization like ACBAR, which supports a network of humanitarian NGOs, can coordinate aid from other countries. The Afghan people place a high level of trust in Japan, while the West is generally distrusted. Japan is expected to play an important role in mediating with local factions in Afghanistan. Such an initiative will also have an important meaning internationally. I hope you will consider Japan’s active contribution in this role.



**[Summary of Presentation by Dr. Khaled Reshad]**



We were worried that maternal and child health services would be constrained under the Taliban regime, but they requested us to continue providing such services. At present, Afghanistan’s agriculture is skewed towards cultivation of poppy for opium production. This is because during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Soviet forces burned down the forests in the mountains as they mopped up mujahideen fighters. This eroded the water-retaining capacity of the mountains, making it difficult to grow regular crops. People had to rely on cultivation of poppy in order to survive.

Dr. Tetsu Nakamura, who sadly passed away two years ago, planted trees in the mountains to restore agriculture, and used traditional irrigation methods to increase production of vegetables and fruits in the region. This shows that there is potential. Conflicts do not arise if people have enough food to eat. Further expanding on the assistance in agricultural reconstruction provided by Dr. Nakamura and others is extremely important for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. I hope Japan will further promote cooperation in this area.

○ Q&A Session

**[Hon. Kiyoshi Odawara]**

In Afghanistan, it almost appears that even if we provide aid, the aid will become meaningless due to the conflict. Under such circumstances, it is very difficult to answer the question of how we can provide aid that is meaningful.



**[Dr. Daisaku Higashi]**

Before the Soviet invasion, Afghanistan had been involved in building a peaceful nation. As, ironically, order has been restored under the Taliban regime, we believe we can now provide aid more effectively than before.

**[Hon. Ryuhei Kawada, Director of JFPF]**

The falling rice prices in Japan are a problem for rice farmers in Japan. Even though the United States may be staunchly opposed, can the government buy the rice and send it to Afghanistan in the form of aid?



**[Dr. Khaled Reshad]**

As indica rice is the preferred grain variety for the Afghan people, I think such aid would be effective. At the same time, the Afghan people could grow rice for themselves if there is irrigation. Afghan children ask me, “What is peace?” because they have never experienced it. In addition to emergency aid, I hope that you will consider assisting the country in nation-building.

**[Hon. Hitoshi Kikawada, Secretary-General of JFPF]**

The situation remains difficult. This is really an issue involving democracy and how we provide assistance. To protect our principles of democracy and freedom, we need to provide specific assistance and think of ways to actually improve the situation of the Afghan people.



\*\*\*\*\*

Lastly, Dr. Higashi expressed his appreciation to the JPFP for its efforts in making possible Japan's additional contribution to the COVAX facility and enabling Japan to host a vaccine summit, both of which were proposed by Dr. Higashi in his lecture at the JPFP study meeting in September 2020. He expressed hopes that some kind of policy action will come out of this study meeting as well. In response, the Hon. Kamikawa said, "We hope to carefully consider what response is possible".



At a later date, volunteers from JPFP compiled "Five Recommendations on the Humanitarian Crisis in Afghanistan and Japan's Role", and submitted it to the Japanese government.

### Hybrid Meeting on Nairobi Commitments Follow-up under COVID-19

Over two days on 25 and 26 November, the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD) and the Asian Population and Development Association (APDA; the secretariat for JPFP) organized the Hybrid Meeting on Nairobi Commitments<sup>1</sup> Follow-up under COVID-19. The meeting was supported by the Asia and the Pacific Regional Office of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA APRO) and the Japan Trust Fund (JTF).

Women, ethnic minorities, and children are the most vulnerable members of society at times of emergencies. These groups also overlap as a focus of population programmes. The meeting was organized from the perspective that establishing support mechanisms and international cooperation is essential to reducing the impact on vulnerable members of society. Such mechanisms and cooperation is also essential for preventing unwanted pregnancies, which are at the root of population issues.

The first day of the meeting was conducted in a hybrid format, combining face-to-face and online participation, with a total of nearly 80 people in attendance. The meeting focused on global governance and resource mobilization mechanism for infectious diseases control. Lectures were delivered by experts in the respective fields of health and finance, followed by Q&A sessions.

#### [Summary of Opening Remarks by Hon. Prof. Keizo Takemi, Chair of AFPPD and Executive Director of JPFP]

The global COVID-19 pandemic has brought about destructive long-term changes in every aspect of our lives, impacted women and children in vulnerable positions, and had unprecedented effects in many fields. The way we communicate has dramatically changed during the pandemic. As parliamentarians, we enact laws in the best interest of the people, and to that end, we need to listen carefully to the voices of the people and to rethink how we communicate.



#### [Summary of the Opening Remarks by Hon. Yoko Kamikawa, Chair of JPFP]

The coronavirus pandemic of the last two years has reminded us that we are all inhabitants of the same planet and that an incident originating in one country can quickly spread across the world. In response, we need coordination and mechanisms on a global scale that goes beyond the framework of the nation-state, and it is of paramount importance that we establish a new set of standards and rules. As one step in that direction, this meeting will discuss how to provide financing to swiftly address infectious diseases and other international emergencies. Global governance is essential to achieving sustainable development. And to promote global governance, it is critically important for parliamentarians who legislate on behalf of its citizens to make further efforts in cooperation and contribution.

#### [Summary of Opening Remarks by Mr. Björn Andersson, Regional Director of UNFPA APRO]

The Nairobi Summit on ICPD25 in 2019 highlighted the importance of providing universal access to health care. At that time, no one could have predicted that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic would be this devastating. Over the past 18 months, the health care system has been on the brink of a crisis, investment in routine health care services has been cut back, communities have been significantly impacted, and the use of health services has been restricted for many people. All of this had a particularly negative impact on maternal mortality. It is clear that we need to make better use of resources, develop innovative strategies, and direct more public funds toward people's health without further increasing out-of-pocket costs for individuals and households. I hope that parliamentarians will continue to play an important role in ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights as part of universal health coverage (UHC).

<sup>1</sup> Commitments adopted at the Nairobi Summit that was held in Kenya in 2019 in commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo in 1994.

**[Summary of Presentation by Mr. Masato Kanda, Vice Minister of Finance for International Affairs, Ministry of Finance of Japan]**

UHC is the most important issue today in all countries of the world in achieving the SDGs. Based on our experience of having established a universal health insurance system, Japan has emphasized the importance of integrated international cooperation between experts in health and finance in combating infectious diseases. The coronavirus pandemic has laid bare a significant gap in countries' ability to cope with the pandemic. This gap will have a significant long-term impact. The causes of this gap include varying conditions found in different countries, lack of information sharing among multilateral and bilateral agencies, limited cooperation between policy makers in the fields of finance and health, and inadequate financial resources for effectively preventing and preparing for future pandemics.

To address these issues, we need to urgently establish global governance that will enable health systems to efficiently develop, manufacture, procure, and deliver vaccines and medical devices and to set up a resource mobilization mechanism to support it. Such global governance needs to be appropriately integrated with the participation of the World Bank and other international financial institutions as well as health-related international organizations.



**[Hon. Shintaro Ito]**

As the situation varies from country to country, what are the criteria that we need to consider when making decisions about financial assistance? The important question we should be asking is what are the key criteria that we should prioritize. Will it be the country's capacity and willingness to respond, the stance adopted by its leaders, or other factors?

**[Mr. Masato Kanda, Vice Minister of Finance for International Affairs, Ministry of Finance of Japan]**

That is exactly what we are working on right now. In integrating health and finance, we believe our mission is to formulate international policies that are effective and that are based on scientific knowledge.

**[Summary of Presentation by Dr. Takeshi Kasai, World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Director for the Western Pacific]**

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the close linkage between health, economy, and social welfare in the broad sense. It also showed us that global health challenges require multilateral mechanisms and institutions that are effective and that adopt a long-term perspective. Nobody foresaw development of effective vaccines in such a short period of time, but challenges still remain in fulfilling COVAX's mission of ensuring equitable access to the vaccines. Criticism has been directed at countries' low vaccination rates. This is due to countries not having sufficient capacity to vaccinate people, and there is a need to improve countries' delivery systems. There are also other challenges beside COVID-19, such as antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and other health security issues, noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) and ageing, climate change and environment, and supporting people who have no access to systems and institutions. Now that we know that no country is safe unless all countries are protected, countries and regions as well as international organizations need to engage in long-term efforts that are based on cooperation rooted in mutual respect for each other's positions.

**[Wrap-up by Hon. Prof. Keizo Takemi, Chair of AFPPD]**

With the ongoing reform of WHO, international partnerships will become increasingly more important in establishing an international framework, and parliamentarians will also have a greater role to play. We hope to enhance our capacity for networking towards designing this new strategy.

On the next day on 26 November, more than 20 representatives from AFPPD member countries participated online, and reported on their respective national committees' activities during the coronavirus pandemic of the last two years, including efforts made in relation to the three pillars of AFPPD's activities: ageing, youth, and gender.



JPPF Secretariat  
TEL: +81-3-5405-8844  
FAX: +81-3-5405-8845  
E-mail: [apda@apda.jp](mailto:apda@apda.jp)



Supported by  
The International Planned Parenthood  
Federation (IPPF)