



# The Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population

## NEWS LETTER

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### Arab and Asian Parliamentarians Meeting and Study Visit on Population and Development, Jordan

#### *From Youth Bulge to Demographic Dividend: Toward Regional Development and Achievement of the SDGs*



On July 18-20 the Asian Population and Development Association (APDA), the Secretariat of the Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population (JPF), organized the Arab and Asian Parliamentarians Meeting and Study Visit on Population and Development in Jordan, hosted by the Jordanian Senate. This project was organized at the request of the Forum of Arab Parliamentarians on Population and Development (FAPPD), and with the support of the Japan Trust Fund (JTF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF). It was the first inter-regional meeting in the Arab region of parliamentarians working in the field of population and development.



The Meeting was well attended by approximately 100 participants from 16 countries, including parliamentarians from the Arab, Asian, European and African regions, as well as representatives from international organizations, government bodies, and the media. JPF was represented by Hon. Ichiro Aisawa, Acting JPF Chair; Hon. Teruhiko Mashiko, JPF Vice-Chair; and Hon. Hiroyuki Nagahama, JPF Vice-Chair. Hon. Aisawa gave an opening address; Hon. Mashiko gave a keynote address; and Hon. Nagahama gave a closing address.



The youth population in the Arab world has increased enormously as a result of the region's having experienced a demographic transition to a certain degree. Provided that the conditions are in place to make the best use of this population of young people, this process is undoubtedly characterized by a "demographic dividend" and represents a good opportunity for economic growth to occur. If those conditions are not present, however, the frustration that young people feel might boil over, resulting in social instability. Compared to less developed regions, such as Africa for example, levels of education in Arab countries are relatively high, and for that reason also youth unemployment can be a direct factor leading to social instability. What is unfortunate about the Middle East currently is the ongoing misery resulting from various conflicts. While the media reports on its religious and political conflicts, away from the headlines food production is suffering under the impact of droughts and youth

unemployment is rising in this region, causing young people to lose hope for the future.

The Meeting was intended to discuss the way to tackle population issues using means acceptable to every country and lock in place the conditions needed to achieve sustainable development, leaving any debate on cultural values to one side for our purpose to reduce human unhappiness. This was also JPPF's guiding principle when it took the lead in establishing the regional forum in Asia. While countries in the Arab world face a multitude of problems, the one thing that is certain is that engaging in any discussion of what values are correct or incorrect would not solve those problems. This was pointed by all the Japanese participants.



An Arab perspective was highlighted in the keynote speech by Hon. Samir Habashna, former Secretary General of the Forum of African and Arab Parliamentarians on Population and Development (FAAPPD) and former Interior Minister of Jordan. He noted that “while these issues were taken up at the 1994 Cairo Conference, we have not been able to produce any effective results”. He continued that the prophet Muhammad also used the expression ‘people’, and stressed that this recognizes Christianity, Judaism and other faiths and that no problem was going to be solved by thinking that if it is not in Islam, then it cannot be approved.

In discussions, Hon. Tan Sri Dato' Seri Abdul Khalid Ibrahim of Malaysia defined the role that parliamentarians have to fulfill, particularly mentioning that “we parliamentarians have a responsibility to build the future. If we do not bring about development that is sustainable, then humanity has no future. When developing any government policy we must have the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in our minds – it is we who have the power to give legislative shape to those Goals”. When the Meeting was in the planning stage, there were concerns over whether these particular precepts for the work of parliamentarians would be acceptable to people in Arab countries, given the characteristics of the region. It became clear, however, that the Arab parliamentarians shared the same sense of crisis. As a result, deliberations on the draft Statement were accepted in full, sharing the basic precepts for the work of parliamentarians for achieving the SDGs. The Meeting saw the unanimous adoption of the Statement that affirmed the role that parliamentarians were to fulfill in promoting stable societies and regional development, through investing in health, education and employment, and by channeling the large increase in the population of young people into a demographic dividend.

The Meeting was held on the two separate days of July 18 and 20 on the following topics, with the first day having been held in the Jordanian Senate Hall:

- Session 1: The Challenges of the Region: Young Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons and Immigration
- Session 2: Demographic Dividend and Employment Opportunity for Youth
- Session 3: Healthy Society and Gender Equality: Women Empowerment, UHC and Youth Access to RH
- Session 4: Impact of Economic Development and International Division of Labour for Young People
- Session 5: Parliamentarians' Role on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
- Session 6 : Discussion for the Adoption of Parliamentarians Statement



During the Study Visit on July 19, participants visited the city of Al-Salt, located 30km north-west of Amman. In resource-poor Jordan, the development of a tourism industry drawing on the country's historical assets and natural features is a national priority, and JICA supported tourism development projects in Al-Salt between 2012 and 2016. Today the Salt Development Corporation (SDC) has taken over these projects and has been promoting tourism development that taps into the city's cultural heritage, by making Al-Salt a model city for religious harmony. They also provide support with skills training and job opportunities for local people with disabilities and help raise the economic prospects of local residents.

The attending parliamentarians, in particular from Arab countries, expressed deep gratitude to the Japanese government for its support to projects such as this and also expressed the hope that APDA would expand this sort of cooperation further and continue to organize projects that involved Asian and Arab parliamentarians.