



News

JPPF Study Meeting: *Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic through “Human Security”: Japan’s Role in Solving Global Issues*

While a clear path to global containment of COVID-19 is yet to materialize, the world is struggling to find ways to balance containment and economic recovery. On 25 September, JPPF held a study meeting that was the first under Chair Hon. Yoko Kamikawa. Dr. Daisaku Higashi of Sophia University, who has been an active commentator in the media on Japan’s roles, gave a lecture titled, “Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic through ‘Human Security’: Japan’s Roles in Solving Global Issues”. There was a lively engagement of the participants in the Q&A session that followed.

[Address by Chair Hon. Yoko Kamikawa]

It was a major decision for me to accept my appointment as Chair of JPPF, a parliamentary caucus steeped in tradition that was built by venerable figures both from the ruling and opposition parties and by experts. I made a pledge to myself to do whatever I can to contribute to further development of JPPF.

I believe we need greater participation of parliamentarians in order to put together, and act on, proposals based on correct understanding of the state of affairs, while carefully contemplating how we should pursue activities of JPPF under the COVID-19 pandemic. We had the pleasure of inviting Dr. Higashi, a renowned expert on “Human Security”, who contributed to making our first study meeting a meaningful one. My relations with Dr. Higashi go back to the time when we worked together on the enactment of the Basic Act on Crime Victims. We hope to organize a series of similar study meetings in the future.



[Summary of Lecture by Dr. Daisaku Higashi]



A global pandemic such as COVID-19 cannot be solved by a country alone. Even if Japan succeeds in containing COVID-19 somehow, as long as the pandemic continues elsewhere in the world, there could always be a resurgence as soon as our border is opened to large numbers of foreign visitors. The global economy overall will shrink if the global pandemic were to persist, dealing a major blow to corporate profitability and employment in Japan. As close to half of Japan’s trading partners are developing countries, it is in Japan’s interest to contain the disease globally. Because the COVID-19 pandemic is a global threat that no one country can fend off on its own, it is a human security issue.

Japan’s consistent adherence to pacifism over 75 years after the Second World War has won trust in the world’s conflict areas. As a director for the NHK public broadcaster, I was involved in the production of the “NHK Special” programs that covered the Middle East peace process and the Vietnam War. After I left this position, I earned a Ph.D. degree in Canada, conducted studies in Afghanistan, South Sudan, Iraq, Syria and East Timor as an expert in peacebuilding, and worked as a United Nations official. These experiences have shown that all sides to a conflict usually place a high level of trust in Japan.

In my book *Naisen to wahei: gendai senso wo do owaraseruka* (Civil War and Peace: How to End Modern Wars) published in January this year, I proposed that Japan should draw on such trust and play the role of a “global facilitator”. I also argued in the book that Japan can play this role to address such issues as infectious diseases and global warming that cannot be solved alone by any one country.

Development of a global framework for COVID-19 has started, and COVAX Facility, a mechanism for pooled procurement of safe vaccines for 20% of the population, was established at the end of August. The Government of Japan has announced it will join the facility and, in September, committed to provide upfront payment to reserve vaccines for Japanese citizens. I would like to propose in the development of global solutions to COVID-19 that Japan pledge as much as EU (about \$500 million) in advance market contributions (AMC) that will allow developing countries to have access to the vaccines under the COVAX Facility, which is co-led by Gavi, CEPI, and WHO. I would also propose that Japan host and chair an international conference for promoting COVAX and for developing the needed system for COVAX. This is truly the moment when Japan should play its role as a “global facilitator” to promote dialogue for development of global solutions for COVID-19 with Japan as the host country and with ideas coming from participating member states, international organizations, experts, and NGOs.

Japan has relatively good relations with the United States, China and Russia, which are not participating in COVAX at the moment. Japan could, while promoting dialogue as the host country, try to persuade these countries to join. In terms of parliamentary diplomacy, it will be meaningful if JPFP could organize remote conferences together with parliamentary fora in Asia, Africa, the Arab world, and other counterparts such as the Japan-EU Parliamentary Friendship League to strengthen partnership. I would like to emphasize that these efforts will contribute to finding global solutions to COVID-19, which in turn will protect the lives and employment of Japanese citizens.

© Q&A Session

[Hon. Keizo Takemi]

Human Security became an important concept as it shed light on the community to enable individuals to live their lives with dignity. There is, however, no new conceptual construct in terms of macroscopic policy that can deal with today's global issues. There is a need for such a construct. The concept of human security is also a crosscutting policy concept covering multiple fields. In that sense, Japan could send a message that promoting UHC under SDG3 for good health and wellbeing may bring about solutions in other fields, from a new and broader perspective of achieving the SDGs.

[Hon. Asahiko Mihara]

Hon. Mihara expressed his respect for Dr. Higashi for his ability to find positive and hopeful aspects of people, despite having studied in detail the suffering and hardship in conflict areas. He also said he supports Japan's financial contributions for COVID-19 response, which could also be used as a diplomatic tool to increase Japan's presence. By mentioning the Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research in Ghana where Japan-educated Ghanaians are working and Nagasaki University's Kenya Research Station, as examples, he hinted at the use of existing organizations to increase Japan's presence in the field of infectious diseases.

[Hon. Hitoshi Kikawada]

Hon. Kikawada expressed appreciation to Dr. Higashi for his excellent lecture. He noted that not a single country in the world has initiated leadership in calling for a concerted global action to the global COVID-19 pandemic and that this spoke volumes about the seriousness of the issue at hand. He asked questions on the specific measures by which Japan could exercise leadership or play the role of a facilitator.

[Dr. Daisaku Higashi]

Dr. Higashi said he agreed with Hon. Takemi's views on Human Security, and suggested that the international aspect of the concept of "human security"—in other words, the policy concept of how the world as a whole should protect individuals from global threats that cannot be dealt with by a single country alone—may need to be stressed more in the future.

He noted that Ms. Sadako Ogata, who was the first person to propose the concept of "Human Security", had shared a similar view in a conversation with Dr. Higashi. He also noted that when United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres gave a lecture at Sophia University during his visit to Japan in 2017, the Secretary-General chose to speak on the topic of "Global Challenges: The Role of Human Security" and suggested that this concept should be used more at the United Nations.

Dr. Higashi mentioned that as pointed out by Hon. Mihara, it is without doubt that health and global environment are some of the fields in which Japan can excel and that he is convinced that the world will welcome an expanded role of Japan in these fields. If Japan could include in its national strategy its role as a facilitator of dialogue to solve global issues, Japan should be able to more robustly engage in activities in these fields.

In response to the questions from Hon. Kikawada, he proposed Japan to provide as much as EU in advance market contributions (AMC) to support developing countries under the COVAX and to host an international conference to promote the COVAX. He concluded his lecture by suggesting that Japan could also play its role by persuading the United States, China and Russia to participate in the COVAX.



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 parliamentarian caucus with a long history and tradition of leading Japan's diplomacy in the international community.

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

JPPF Column:

- Hon. Ichiro Aisawa, Member of the House of Representatives
- Hon. Hideki Makihara, Member of the House of Representatives
- Hon. Teruhiko Mashiko, Member of the House of Councillors

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[Editorial responsibility: JPPF secretariat]

JPPF Column



Hon. Ichiro Aisawa

Member of the House of Representatives

The future of our world depends on Africa achieving sustainable growth, as an engine of the world, amid rapid population increase in the region. This means that it is important to assist African countries through ODA and the TICAD process as well as build a win-win relation between Japan and Africa as business partners. In this regard, we already have had tangible results from Japan's private-sector involvement.

Otowa Electric, for example, provided lightning rods and lightning protection systems in a JICA project in Rwanda, where many are killed or injured by lightning, and saved many lives and prevented numerous injuries.

Saraya promotes hand washing in Uganda to contribute to better hygiene; Toyota Tsusho supports long-term growth of Africa through its operations there; and Stripe International, an

apparel company based in Okayama City, has a production base in Ethiopia. As Chair of the Japan-AU Parliamentary Friendship League, I am also working with JICA and the business community to assist Africa on many fronts.

If we turn our attention to my local district, Okayama Prefecture and Okayama City are known as "SDGs Advanced Prefecture" and "SDGs Future City", respectively, for their leading SDGs initiatives.

In particular, Okayama University was chosen as the winner of the Special Award in the 1st Japan SDGs Award (recipients selected by the SDGs Promotion Headquarters, which is presided over by the Prime Minister), and the geography and history club at Sanyo Girls' Junior and Senior High School in Okayama City won the same award in the 2nd Japan SDGs Award.

The advanced level of collaboration between municipalities, firms, and local citizens in Okayama is now well-recognized. I work with local citizens and communities including young people and schools to further arouse interest in these global issues.

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Hon. Hideki Makihara

Member of the House of Representatives

I entered politics out of patriotism. My aspirations are to make Japan a country in which every citizen can say, "I feel fortunate to be born in Japan". There are many good things in Japan, one of which is that there are opportunities for anyone willing to make the effort.

Children from families with economic hardships, however, face real challenges, such as the education gap and chain of poverty.

Children cannot choose the family they are born into. In the hope of helping such children and breaking the chains of poverty, I played a leadership role in legislating a private members' bill and guidelines on child poverty, as a founding member and Secretary-General of the Parliamentary Group for Promoting Measures against Child Poverty.

We have also allocated a budget for the program for creating secure space for children.

As the State Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare, I was also involved in the amendment of the Child Abuse Prevention Act.

Out of a sense of crisis about young people's indifference to politics and as the first Chair of the supra-partisan Parliamentary Group on Youth Policy

Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population (JFPF)

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Promotion, which is constituted by young parliamentarians under the age of 50, I have made various proposals for promoting young people's participation in politics.

While the voting age is 18 in Japan, the age at which one can stand as a candidate is 25, so that young people can vote but cannot stand in an election. We are seriously discussing ways to lower the eligibility age for candidacy.

I think Japan's biggest strength is its "people". Japan is geographically disadvantaged, its natural resources are mostly imported, and its food self-sufficiency rate is low compared to other countries. In spite of this, it is the strength of its "people" that has made Japan's development possible.

On the other hand, I was deeply shocked to learn from news reports of a series of frauds involving a subsidy program for small business owners and proprietors affected by the coronavirus pandemic, a program that I put all my efforts into as the State Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry.

While I am dismayed with the drift towards self-centeredness in a country in which "people" are its most valuable asset, there is a need to think carefully about Japan's future. It will be essential to properly understand and impress upon ourselves that each and every person in this country is important as we try to build this country.

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Hon. Teruhiko Mashiko

Member of the House of Councillors

Ever since the Great East Japan Earthquake on 11 March 2011, I have been working consistently towards my new mission and duty to restore my local district of Fukushima Prefecture and expand the use of renewable energy to end our reliance on nuclear energy.

As made clear by the COVID-19 pandemic, disruption of the global supply chains has a major impact on our ability to procure energy, food and other resources. I feel a sense of crisis about this state of affairs in our country, and believe that there is a pressing need to promote local production for local consumption of energy and expand the use of renewable energy.

Jointly with Hon. Toshihiro Nikai, I represent the supra-partisan Parliamentary Group for Geothermal

Energy. We visit geothermal power plants in and outside Japan. Matsukawa Geothermal Power Plant in Iwate Prefecture is Japan's first geothermal power plant that has continued to operate strongly for over 50 years. We have also entered into memoranda of understanding for cooperation with local governments in Iceland and New Zealand.

In the future, it will become possible to meet all of Japan's electricity demand with renewable energy alone.

For example, offshore wind has the potential to domestically generate 90 million kW, equivalent to electricity generated by 90 nuclear power plants. By using solar, wind, biomass and geothermal, and potentially hydrogen in the future, we hope to create a society without nuclear power plants as soon as possible.

A major challenge is finding the sites for final disposal of radioactive waste. This is an issue that politicians must confront head on. What is needed is transparency, trust, and independence. It was to address this issue that we established our supra-partisan parliamentary caucus.

I have been involved with population issues for about 30 years. After being elected to the House of Representatives for the first time in 1990, I began participating in JPPF activities under the chairpersonship of Hon. Shintaro Abe.

After entering the House of Councillors, I was appointed Executive Director of JPPF and worked with Hon. Yasuo Fukuda, the then Chair of JPPF, to promote mutual understanding and cooperation with fellow parliamentarians in other regions of the world tackling these issues.

In particular, parliamentarians from Africa have thought highly of and have

substantial expectations on Japan's support in terms of financial aid, personnel, and technical assistance.

Closely connected with the issues of energy, food, and the environment, population issues are critical issues that may determine the future survival of the human race. Even though many issues remain unresolved in this age of great transformation, I remain committed to tackling those challenges that only parliamentarians are in a position to address.

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