

Statement to the 60th Commission on the Status of Women

October 15, 2015

New Japan Women's Association (NJWA)

Since its foundation in 1962, the New Japan Women's Association, with its 150,000 members all over Japan, has been working for the abolition of nuclear weapons, rights of women and children, and solidarity of women around the world for peace.

Developed Countries Are Urged to Take the Lead in the Effort to Build a Peaceful, Just and Sustainable World

The New Japan Women's Association welcomes the adoption by the Seventieth Session of the United Nations General Assembly of a new development agenda entitled "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", which set out 17 Sustainable Development Goals as universal goals and targets for the entire world, developed and developing countries alike, not just rich donors aiding poor recipients, calling on everyone in society to act. As a women's group in Japan, one of the highly developed countries, the New Japan Women's Association urges the Government of Japan to take the lead in implementing the new development agenda.

The first of the Sustainable Development Goals, ending poverty, is a challenge for us in Japan. Prime Minister Abe Shino has been selling his economic policy using catchphrases like "women are key to the growth strategy" and "building Japan where all women can shine". He recently announced three new policy pillars: strong economic growth, support for child rearing, and improved social security measures.

The reality is, however, Japan's Gross Domestic Product has been on a decline trend since the increase of the consumption tax rate last year. Non-regular employment continues to rise and among all female employees, 56 percent are non-regular workers. The government forced the adverse revision of the Worker Dispatch Law to lift regulations on the use of temporary agency workers, most of whom are women. By this amendment temporary workers will be denied the chance for direct employment, and for women, it means the very basis for becoming economically self-sustaining will be undermined.

While Prime Minister is vowing to increase "support for child rearing", the government policy has resulted in more children on the waiting list for day-care centers and higher day-care fees, aggravating, instead of improving, the conditions for ensuring families to raise children without anxiety in a safe and healthy environment. The government has also pushed forward the reduction of social security spending, imposing more burden on the people with higher pension premiums and less benefits, and with more medical expenses and less services. Anxiety for future is growing among people. It seeks to participate in the Trans-Pacific Partnership, and to restart and export nuclear reactors claiming that nuclear power can

mitigate global warming. All these are part of the Prime Minister's growth strategy which gives priority to transnationals' profit-making over people's livelihood. The government is even set to terminate the subsidies for victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake Disaster and the accident at the Tokyo Electric Company's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. Meanwhile, the government seeks record-high military budget, and is ready to promote arms export in violation of the Constitutions.

The Cabinet's push of each of these economic policies aiming to make Japan the "most business-friendly nation in the world", along with its plan to transform Japan into a militaristic state, is igniting criticism from the public and women are raising their voices, saying, "If the government really wants women to play active role, increase regular employment, raise wages, build more day-care centers and provide adequate pension benefits!"

Do Away with Militarism to Eliminate Violence against Women

To the Ninth Review Conference of the State Parties to the Treaty on the Non Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons which was held from late April to May, 2015, the Japanese civil society presented more than 6.3 million signatures calling on the governments to swiftly start negotiations on a convention banning nuclear weapons. Of those signatures, more than 1.5 million were collected by our Association members. We are convinced that the movement we have carried forward in the atomic bombed Japan, together with the Hibakusha, atomic bomb survivors, calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons, has made a difference in international politics as seen in the growing support for the approach toward banning these weapons from humanitarian perspectives.

The Cabinet of Prime Minister Abe railroaded through the Diet the war bills to enable Japan to send its Self-Defense Forces anytime and anywhere, contravening the Constitution's Article 9 which declares Japan's renunciation of war, no possession of war potential and denial of the right to belligerency. Outcry and actions opposing the attempt to make Japan a war-waging nation and calling for defending democracy have spread out throughout the country on an unprecedented scale. Even after the forcible passage of the bills, the struggle continues calling for repeal of the war legislation, and the initiative has started for establishing a new government through cooperation among parties, organizations, and individuals sharing the goal to repeal the war laws. What is impressive is how women and young people have been empowered to become agents for change. Both in front of the Diet building and in communities all over Japan, they are organizing and mobilizing saying, "Never allow our children to be sent to the battlefield", "Don't let anyone's child get killed", and "We are the ones to decide our own future".

Prime Minister's rush towards militarization conflicts with his own pledge for "eradicating sexual violence against women in conflict". Above all, Japan has the responsibility to resolve the war time sexual slavery known as the issue of "comfort women", the worst form of human rights violation and war crime it committed. However, the Cabinet of Prime Minister Abe,

rather than settling the issue, has continued to deny even the historical facts insisting that “there was no coercion involved in recruiting women”. This attitude of the government tramples upon survivors’ human rights and dignity over and over.

On September 29, the Japanese government announced the completion of Japan's first National Action Plan for the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. The final draft had been elaborated through consultations with the civil society, but grave amendment was made before publishing it. From the preface, the reference to Japan’s war responsibility including for the sexual violence against women was deleted. Also disappeared were descriptions of protection measures for gender-based violence by foreign military personnel stationed in Japan and of prevention of hate speech. In Okinawa, where the “All Okinawa” struggle against the new base construction is going on with the governor taking the lead, and elsewhere in Japan, which hosts more than 130 military bases and facilities of the United States, local people continue to suffer serious damage due to the military presence including sexual violence against women and girls by United States servicemen. The government of Japan should be held accountable for watering down the spirit and purpose of the Security Council Resolution 1325 in Japan’s National Action Plan.

Moreover, in the Japanese version of the National Action Plan, the government replaced the word “gender” wherever it appeared in the final draft with such Japanese wording as “equal participation of men and women”, “by/according to sex”, or “women”. Chief Cabinet Secretary, who holds a key position in Japan’s national machinery for the promotion of gender equality, recently came under fire for his remarks that he expected Japanese women to “contribute to the State by having more children”. Japanese women now clearly understand the current Cabinet is dominated by the far-right extremists, including Prime Minister and female ministers, who deny the facts of war of aggression, idealize the pre-war Japan under militarism and patriarchal system, and refuse to respect the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The New Japan Women’s Association is resolved to act in solidarity with women in Japan and around the world for the promotion of “gender equality, development and peace” as well as for the accomplishment of the Sustainable Development Goals in order to achieve a peaceful, just and sustainable world.