



# Japanese Women Today

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New Japan Women's  
Association

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## Statement to the 63rd Commission on the Status of Women

October 22, 2018

New Japan Women's Association (NJWA)

Since its foundation in 1962, the New Japan Women's Association, with its 130,000 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.

### Reduction of Social Security Spending Increasing Disparities and Poverty

In Japan, women's poverty has become a major social issue, and the situation is particularly grave among children, single-female-parent families, and elderly women.

In order to assist those children who are not able to eat sufficiently or have to eat alone, women's organizations like the New Japan Women's Association, civil society groups and volunteers have set up more than 2,000 "Children's Cafeterias" throughout Japan. Behind this is the reality that the poverty rate for single-mother families exceeds 50 percent.

60 percent of working women in Japan work in non-regular jobs, women's wage is half of men's, and almost half of them earn less than 2 million yen (17,770 in US dollars) a year. The male-female pay gap results in their pension gap. Without a guaranteed minimum pension system in place, poverty is a critical issue for elderly women. Cuts in pension and welfare benefits, coupled with the raise in health and nursing-care insurances premiums and charges for services weigh heavy on the elderly, leaving 54 percent of older women living alone in poverty. Low wages and low pensions prevent women from becoming economically independent. On the other hand, big corporations with more than 1 billion yen (8.82 million in US dollars) in capital increased their internal reserves to a record 425.8 trillion yen (3.78 trillion in US dollars), and we are calling on these corporations to fulfill their social responsibility by using their huge profits to raise wages of workers.

Background to the rise in poverty and widening income gap is the fact that neoliberal "structural reforms" have been carried out, with deregulation and privatization being promoted in the name of "more efficiency" and "necessary services at one's own expenses", which has resulted in reduced social services including childcare, nursing care and medical care programs. The burden of childrearing and nursing care is more and more imposed upon the family, particularly women, and there has been a rapid increase in the number of those leaving their jobs because they have to take care of their sick or elder family members. As social security is the right of the people recognized by the Constitution, we are calling on the government to improve social services on its own instead of shifting the responsibility to the individuals.

The New Japan Women's Association members all over Japan send requests to Diet members, asking them to oppose the bills for adversely revising the social security system every time such bills are submitted to the Diet. They also bring the actual conditions of those engaged in nursing care, medical care and child care, together with urgent desires of those using or in need of these services to local municipalities and government, calling for better services.

### Life Is the First Priority: Money for Disaster Prevention, Air Conditioning for Schools, and Welfare

In summer 2018, Japan hit the record-high temperature amid severe heat wave, as declared "natural disaster" by the weather agency. In classrooms, most of which lack air conditioners, children's health was at great risk. Apart from the heat wave, Japan experienced multiple disasters, enduring weeks of unanticipated and unprecedented torrential rains, typhoons and earthquakes, which caused immense damage to people's living and local economy of the affected areas. With such messages as "Life Is the First Priority" and

“Protect Children”, the New Japan Women’s Association throughout the country requested municipalities to install air conditioners in classrooms as well as to review the disaster prevention measures. The Association also petitioned the Education Ministry calling on the State to take responsibility to deal with the situation, and succeeded in having the government to allocate a supplementary budget of 935.6 billion yen (8.75 million in US dollars) to assist municipalities to equip classrooms with air-conditioning.

Since 1980, the New Japan Women’s Association has carried on the movement demanding, “Cut Military Spending and Use the Money for Better Living, Welfare and Education”. Now that more and more countries are signing the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons adopted by the United Nations in July 2017 towards its ratification, and that a positive change is taking place in the Korean Peninsula with efforts are being made to realize peace through dialogues, the Association is committed to strengthen the movement more than ever.

### **For a Society without Sexual Harassment, Women Take Actions**

As #MeToo movement spread worldwide, women in Japan, too, protested with anger against sexual harassment and sexist words and deeds of politicians and bureaucrats, and against the recent revelation that one of the top medical universities had discriminated female applicants in entrance exams and that multiple institutions had done the same. Women are standing up to take actions for transforming the society into one without sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination.

Japan dropped to a record-low of 114th among the 144 countries in the Global Gender Gap for 2017, remaining at the bottom of the developed nations. The major cause for this is the under-representation of women in politics and their low economic status due to the unshrinking gender pay gap and the small number of women in management positions. It is in this context that more and more women start unleashing their long pent-up rage and frustration.

The New Japan Women’s Association released urgent proposals for “Creating a Society without Sexual Harassment”, calling on the entire society to share the recognition that sexual harassment constitutes a grave human right’s violation, and to build a consensus on its elimination including through legislation to prohibit sexual harassment and training. The Association members at local level are bringing the proposals to municipal authorities and local governments to have talks with them. Our activities on the ground include visits to convenience stores in each community with requests to stop selling pornographic magazines, in which women are solely sexualized. A local chain and some stores have responded by suspending the sales of such magazines.

Women’s empowerment and gender equality are essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, the common challenge for the international community. The New Japan Women’s Association will continue acting calling for the promotion of social security and services to guarantee decent lives and work for all, with the primary responsibility taken by the State; for reviewing “neoliberal” economic policies, which have widened inequality and poverty, from gender and human rights perspectives; and for moving the money from military spending to investment in people’s lives and living.

The New Japan Women’s Association (NJWA or Shinfujin) was founded on October 19, 1962. About 133,000 members are organized in some 9,000 groups in workplaces and communities all over the country. Shinfujin has a head office that unites chapters working in all the 47 prefectures and branches in 900 municipalities.

Under the five objectives, Shinfujin works to realize all kinds of women’s demands concerning such issues as women’s rights, equality with men, better working and living conditions, measures to support child-care, education, environmental protection, peace and abolition of nuclear weapons. The five objectives are:

- Protect the lives of women and children from the danger of nuclear war
- Oppose the adverse revision of the Constitution and the resurgence of militarism
- Work together for better living conditions, extended women’s rights and children’s well-being
- Win genuine national independence, democracy and emancipation of women
- Join hands with women around the world for building lasting peace



Shinfujin is opened to all women who agree with the above five objectives, irrespective of their thought, creed or political background. It publishes a weekly paper “Shinfujin Shimburu” with 220,000 readers, and a monthly magazine “Josei & Undo” (“Women & The Movement”).

Shinfujin is a member of the Japan Federation of Women’s Organizations (Fudanren) and the International Women’s Year Liaison Group (comprising 35 major Japanese women’s organizations.) It holds special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

## Listen to the Overwhelming Voice of Okinawans and Stop the Construction of a New Base at Henoko Now

February 27, 2019

KASAI Kimiyo

President of the New Japan Women's Association

The prefectural referendum voted and counted on February 24 on the reclamation work for the construction of a new U.S. base off the Henoko district of Nago City, Okinawa Prefecture, marked a monumental victory as the overwhelming majority of voters expressed their opposition to the Henoko base project. 434,273 people (72% of voters) voted “No”, 114,933 (19%) voted “Yes”, and 52,682 (9%) said “Neither”. I express my heartfelt respect to the Okinawan people, who made a decisive choice for peace and democracy. The Japanese government led by Prime Minister Abe Shinzo has ignored the Okinawan people's objections, including the one expressed in the victory of the anti-base candidate in the gubernatorial election last September, and is resorting to outrageous and lawless means to push ahead with the base project. We strongly urge the Abe government to take this judgment of anger seriously and immediately halt the base construction at Henoko .

The number of “no” votes prevailed by a huge margin in all the municipalities in the prefecture, including the five cities whose mayors initially had opted out of the referendum. It also exceeded 290,000, the threshold of more than a quarter of Okinawa's 1.16 million eligible voters required for the governor to communicate the referendum outcome to the governments of Japan and the U.S. It even surpassed the 396,632, the figure Governor Tamaki Denny garnered in the election. While the Liberal Democratic Party, Komei and Ishin no Kai took a negative stance towards the referendum, leaving the choice up to their individual supporters, the voter turnout exceeded 50%, and many supporters of these three parties voted “no”, which was of great significance. The excuse used by the Abe government every time it faced defeat in elections: “there are various contested grounds” is no longer valid, because the referendum this time asked voters precisely about pros and cons of the Henoko reclamation work.

Despite all these, the Abe government continues with landfill work. It has no right any more to speak about Japan being “democracy” or “a nation ruled by law”. It will only become more and more isolated by the “never-give-up” struggle of Okinawa people. The voice is mounting inside and outside Okinawa demanding that the government should decide now whether or not to keep wasting 2,500 billion yens of tax payers' money for more than 13 years on building a base against the people's will, although it is technically impossible because of the thickest layer of soft ground at the construction site reaching a depth of about 90 meters below sea level. This means the U.S.



Landfill work destroying a coral reef filled with hundreds of rare and endangered species

Marines Futenma Air Station, the world's most dangerous base which is supposed to be closed after a new base is constructed, will remain forever.

The New Japan Women's Association members all over Japan stood in solidarity with their sisters in Okinawa Chapter, taking actions in their communities, saying, “The base problems of Okinawa are about the authoritarian way of Abe to push his own agenda. Citizens and Opposition Parties Unite! Bring down the Abe Cabinet!” Now is the time for us outside Okinawa to follow the Okinawan people who have made a decision. Let us accelerate our efforts to achieve good results in the by-election in Okinawa's 3rd district for the House of Representatives on April 21, in the nationwide local elections in April, and in the House of Councilors' election in July, so that we can dislodge the PM Abe's LDP-Komei ruling coalition.



NJWA Okinawa Chapter members campaigning for “No” Vote in the referendum



NJWA Tokyo Chapter members taking to streets in solidarity with Okinawa

## Celebrating the 40th Anniversary of the Adoption of CEDAW Women Taking Action to Make a Difference

The global wave of #MeToo Movement has also reached Japan, inspiring more and more women to voice against sexual harassment, gender-based violence and discrimination, stereotyped portrayal of women in the media, as well as sexist speeches by politicians and lawmakers even including the Cabinet members. Building on the gains achieved by women's unrelenting struggle for their rights and dignity, women keep on moving forward in solidarity.

### Times Up! Sexual Violence and Harassment No More Tolerated

In May 2017, a female journalist ITO Shiori came forward with rape allegations by name on camera. She brought her case to the court but the perpetrator, a high-profile journalist known for his close ties with Prime Minister Abe Shinzo, avoided arrest. However, solidarity and support spread nationwide, convincing many of those who were victimized by sexual assaults and kept silent about their agonies for fear of being stigmatized to speak out.



In the past year since the CSW62, there have been many incidents that show Japan is far from being a gender equal society. In fact, the country is ranked 110th among 149 nations according to the Global Gender Gap Index in 2018. In April, it was revealed that a vice finance minister sexually harassed a female reporter. He denied that he committed sexual harassment, although he resigned facing mounting protests.

Worse still, Finance Minister Aso Taro said that there was no law criminalizing sexual harassment, that the alleged female victim should come forward, and that the vice minister in question also had his own rights to be protected. Similar remarks were repeatedly made by politicians and lawmakers of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party. The most disgusting one came from its lawmaker Sugita Mio who wrote in the article for a monthly magazine that the LGBT people are not productive because they don't bear children and even questioned if taxpayers' money be used for their support. PM Abe stood up for her saying that she was still young and inexperienced. Most recently, a LDP lawmaker resigned amid rape allegations. He first left the party to reduce the damage to the party, but the growing criticism from both ruling and opposition parties, as well as from women and the public, he gave up his seat in the House. And a LDP leader who was a former House Chair made an outrageous statement that he should have done in a way not to draw attention.

None of these politicians and bureaucrats has been held accountable and impunity remains a normal practice, even under the Prime Minister Abe, who boasts of his willingness to make Japan a society where women shine. And this prime minister is trying to revise the Constitution with war-renouncing Article 9, putting more emphasis on the responsibility and duties of the people than on their rights. His group also wants women to be care takers while they work "flexibly" at low pay. This is the government that refuses to recognize Japan's responsibility for the war of aggression against Asian countries forcing many women into sexual slavery, and do not respect recommendations from the CEDAW and other human rights treaty bodies for Japan to implement human rights-centered policies.

### Women Rise in Resistance

Women and people of diversity are pushing back. Female students stand against the medical schools which had deliberately altering entrance exam scores to restrict the number of female students and ensure more men became doctors. A dozen same-sex couples filed first lawsuits on Valentines' Day demanding marriage equality. Various lawsuits and grassroots campaigns are going on calling for a Civil Code amendment to allow married couples to have different family names. On March 5, OPCEDAW Action kicked off to achieve Japan's ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.



Women protesting sexual harassment by vice finance minister as well as Finance Minister's abusive statements

The New Japan Women's Association played a big role in having major convenience store chains to quit selling pornographic magazines. We had campaigned nationwide for the past year with our local members visiting stores in their communities asking the owners and managers not to sell them, because women had long felt offended and because pornography promoted stereotyped image of women so it was a matter of women's human rights.