

Opening Statement by H.E. Mr. Hideaki Ueda, Ambassador in Charge of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, on the occasion of the Consideration on the Third Periodic Report of the Government of Japan for the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Initial Reports of the Optional Protocols

Honorable members of the Committee on the Rights of the Child,

It is a great honour for me to express, on behalf of the Japanese delegation, my sincere respect for the efforts of the Committee, which is working vigorously with the objective of ensuring the rights of the child, at the beginning of the consideration by the Committee on the third periodic report of the Government of Japan for the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the initial reports for the two Optional Protocols.

Last year, the Convention on the Rights of the Child celebrated the 20th anniversary of its adoption at the United Nations General Assembly. In Japan, a commemorative event titled "Happy Birthday, CRC!" was organized last November, with the attendance of First Lady Mrs. Hatoyama and the President of the House of the Councillors, Mr. Eda. (On the other occasion) Ms. Lee, the chairperson of the Committee also visited Japan ~~on this occasion~~ and had an active dialogue with relevant groups and individuals, which provided excellent opportunities to disseminate the philosophy and promote understanding of the Convention in Japan. Japan, as a State Party to the Convention, will continue to work further on necessary legislation and implementation of policy measures, as well as to support children in difficult situations throughout the world through diverse types of cooperation.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the principal mechanism to ensure the respect of and to promote the fundamental human rights of all children. To realize the protection and promotion of the rights of children, who are our future but are placed in vulnerable situations, it is crucially important to evaluate how the Convention is implemented domestically by each State Party.

We are glad to have this meaningful opportunity to be examined by the Committee, through which we can review objectively the status of Japan's implementation of the Convention from an international standpoint and reflect the outcomes in our future policies, in order to further improve the situation of the rights of the child in Japan. I am

also pleased to note that today there are many observers from Japanese civil society. We believe that it is important to reflect wide-ranging opinions in the implementation of the Convention. In this regard, in March this year, the Government of Japan organized the "Symposium on the Convention on the Rights of the Child -Challenges for the Rights of Children-" in Tokyo, with extensive participation from civil society. The Government of Japan will continue dialogue and cooperation with civil society.

Since the Government of Japan submitted the Third Periodic Report for the Convention and the Initial Reports for the Optional Protocols in April 2008, the Government has been steadily introducing both administrative and legislative measures. I would like to focus here on explaining those policies and measures introduced after the submission of the reports, together with an underlying philosophy.

Prime Minister Hatoyama, who took office in September 2009, gave a policy speech before the Diet in January this year. At the beginning of his speech, the Prime Minister remarked, "I want to protect people's lives." and stated his commitment to create "a society in which children around the world no longer lose their lives to starvation, infectious disease, armed conflict or landmines", and also the responsibility of the international community "to secure for the world's children lives in which everyone can drink clean water, be free from discrimination and prejudice, enjoy protection of human rights and receive basic education". Also, he mentioned the power of citizens and non-profit organizations, who are actively striving to resolve everyday issues like those related to education, child rearing, and social welfare, calling it "a new concept of public service". The Prime Minister expressed his intention to harness this power to build a humane society of self-support and co-existence. The Government of Japan has embodied this idea and implemented concrete measures as follows.

<Establishment of the child allowance system >

First of all, the Government of Japan has established a child allowance system. With a declining birthrate, based on a viewpoint that society as a whole guarantees the growth of all children, a law was enforced on 1 April 2010 to the effect that a child allowance is provided for children until their graduation from junior high school.

<Making upper secondary school education free of charge in principle>

Secondly, in order to create a society where all upper secondary school students who desire can devote their efforts to study without anxiety regardless of the economic

situation of their families, a new law was entered into force on 1 April 2010. According to the law, tuition fees at public upper secondary schools will be waived, and for private school students, a new system for providing financial assistance will be established at national expense. This law aims to reduce the burden of education costs on families, through supporting education by the society as a whole, with the expectation that upper secondary school students will play important roles as responsible members of society in the future.

<“Visions for Children and Childcare”>

Furthermore, a comprehensive policy of support for children and child rearing entitled “Visions for Children and Childcare” was decided by the Cabinet in January 2010. Under the “Visions”, the direction of the policies was drastically changed to the idea of “Children first”, with policies such as: the government securing a favorable environment for the growth of all children; society as a whole supporting child-raising families which are responsible for the growth of children; enabling young people and women to secure a stable base for their lives; and establishing a “ministry of children and family”, in an attempt to centralize the relevant government structure in promoting children and childcare-related policies. The entire Government will make efforts for the steady implementation of the “Visions”.

<“Vision for Children and Young People”>

In addition, in accordance with the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, “the Act on Promotion of Development and Support for Children and Young People” entered into force in April 2010, aiming to promote interrelated policies in a comprehensive manner. After the enforcement of this act, by shifting the basic philosophies to considering the best interest of children and young people and to respecting children and young people as partners living with adults, the Government is formulating a new “Vision”, which aims to support the development of all children and young people, as well as to specifically support children and young people with difficulties, through measures such as conducting citizenship education, adopting an outreach method, establishing local support network systems for children and young people, and reforming adult society.

The Vision was discussed, in a consultation body which is open to civil society, with the participation of representatives of the Government at the political level and experts and practitioners on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, prevention of abuse, and education. During the process, the Minister in charge had opportunities to exchange

opinions with young people and to have hearings on various current problems.

<“The law to partially revise the Online Dating Sites Regulation Act”>

There is another threat to children, which is easy access to harmful information, due to the pervasiveness of the Internet and mobile phones, especially in developed countries including Japan. Thus, the Online Dating Sites Regulation Act was partially revised and measures have been enhanced to protect children from crimes, such as child prostitution, caused by harmful information.

<Child pornography>

In 2004, the Act on Punishment of Activities Relating to Child Prostitution and Child Pornography was revised to raise the maximum penalties related to child prostitution and distribution of child pornography to unspecified persons or a number of persons and to expand the coverage of criminal punishment to include providing child pornography to specified persons or a small number of persons. The Government of Japan also established a Working Team on measures to eradicate child pornography, headed by the Senior Vice-Minister of the Cabinet Office, under the Ministerial Meeting Concerning Measures against Crime in December 2009, in order for the ministries concerned to consider and promote comprehensive measures such as a national campaign for the eradication of child pornography. The Government will shortly come up with comprehensive measures including raising public awareness, preventing distribution of child pornography through the Internet, and strengthening the crackdown on child-pornography-related crimes, and will promote measures to eradicate child pornography even more vigorously.

<“Modification of the declaration on the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict”>

Lastly but not least, the Government of Japan ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict in August 2004. Upon ratification, in accordance with Article 3, paragraph 2 of the Optional Protocol, the Government of Japan made a declaration that: (1) the Government recruits only those who are at and above the minimum age of 18 as members of the Japan Self-Defense Forces, with the exception of the cases of “the Youth Cadets”; that (2) the minimum age of recruitment of Youth Cadets is 15 years; and that (3) there are safeguards to ensure that the recruitment of Youth Cadets is not forced or coerced.

Since an amendment of the Self-Defense Forces law and related laws was enacted on April 1 this year, and there will be no more exceptions in terms of a minimum age of 18 for members of the Self-Defense Forces, the Government of Japan modified the declaration accordingly in April this year.

Honorable members of the Committee on the Rights of the Child,

Japan will continue to make the utmost efforts to respect and ensure the rights of the child, taking into account the surroundings and problems facing children given the passage of time and changes in society. The Japanese delegation is ready to provide sincere answers on any matters of concern you may have during this important examination. It is my hope that we will have constructive discussions today and tomorrow.

Thank you very much.