

第 15 回 ASEAN・日本社会保障ハイレベル会合
鈴木医務技監 開会挨拶
テーマ「未来を担う子どもたちの健全な育成」
“Healthy Development of Children for Future Generations”

Distinguished delegates from ASEAN member states and the ASEAN Secretariat,
Distinguished representatives and experts from the WHO, the ILO and JICA, as well as academic and research institutions,
Vice Governor Ms. Akie Omagari, Fukuoka Prefecture,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, I would like to extend a warmest welcome to all of you to the 15th ASEAN-Japan High Level Meeting on Caring Societies. I would also like to express our sincere gratitude to Japanese and foreign collaborators and experts who contribute to this meeting.

This ASEAN-Japan meeting has started since 2003, with the purpose of sharing knowledge with each other, discussing and learning common challenges and good practices, as well as promoting cooperation among Japan and ASEAN member states in the areas of health, labour and welfare.

The theme of this year’s meeting is ‘Healthy Development of Children for Future Generations’.

Multi-sectoral cooperation among maternal and child health, child welfare, and employment sectors, tailored to parents who need support for child care, is key to promoting the healthy development of all children.

It is equally important to establish a comprehensive mechanism to enable all stakeholders in society, such as central and local governments, communities, welfare and medical institutions, schools, and private sectors, to collaborate with each other.

In Japan, our government has launched since 2016 'The Plan for Dynamic Engagement of All Citizens.' It calls for 'Dream-weaving Childcare Support' – that is, nation-wide initiatives to create a society where every woman can have children and every child strives for his or her dream in a safe and secure environment.

I will now turn to three key areas in our efforts, namely, maternal and child health, child's welfare, and woman's empowerment and child care support.

First of all, improving maternal and child health is of a vital importance, which serves as an entry point for achieving universal health coverage.

After the World War II, Japan started very low with health indicators in this area. However, maternal and child health significantly improved with enactment of Child Welfare Act, Immunization Act, and Maternal and Child Health Law, which introduced nationwide maternal check-ups, maternal and child health handbooks and national immunisation programmes of measles and other diseases.

These measures, supported by progress of medical science and technologies, contributed to significantly reducing infant and maternal mortality. Japan has now achieved one of the lowest infant and maternal mortality rates in the world.

Secondly, in the area of child welfare, it is important to ensure the provision of seamless support from pregnancy to child-rearing through closer cooperation between maternal health and child welfare sectors.

Last year, we amended the Child Welfare Act to further strengthen various measures from prevention, early detection of child abuse, to increased support to child abuse victims, which have been implemented through close cooperation between maternal and child health sector, and child welfare sector.

Last but not least, I would like to stress the importance of woman's empowerment and child care support. Women's social advancement

in recent years has resulted in the dynamic changes in families' lifestyle and their environment. As in the case of Japan, such changes could sometimes discourage younger generations from having children and eventually lead to lower birth rates.

In these circumstances, our policy framework must create a society where people can have a choice of having children as they wish, by enhancing childcare services as well as promoting good working environments for both mothers and fathers. The recent trend of lower birth rates is expected to be reversed by implementing these measures in a comprehensive manner.

To conclude, I sincerely hope that this meeting over the next three days will offer valuable opportunities for all participants, ASEAN and Japan alike, to share their knowledge and experiences, and to learn from each other for the better development and implementation of children's policies in your country.

I wish you the best outcome of the meeting, and a nice stay in this vibrant city of Fukuoka, Japan.

Thank you very much for your attention.