

The Statement of Mr. Kato Katsunobu Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japan
in ILO Global Summit on COVID-19 and the World of Work

Director-General, Ladies and Gentlemen, today I would like to share Japan's perspective as a country in the Asia-Pacific region. The ILO has begun its second century in troubled times. Our strength and resilience in response to the current crisis is crucial to realizing the future of work featured in the Centenary Declaration.

While the numbers of infections and fatalities have been contained in much of the Asia-Pacific, restrictions on socio-economic activities have led to increased unemployment and poverty. According to the latest ILO Monitor, lost working hours are equivalent to 400 million full-time jobs around the world, about 60% of which occurred in Asia and the Pacific.

COVID-19 has also been having a huge impact on Japan's employment and economy. Since employment issues follow the spread of infection, we need to consider both the current situation and future developments when taking supporting measures. At present, we are using every available means to protect employment, business and livelihoods. First, we have been making efforts to maintain employment by expanding subsidy to support business owners who provided leave allowance to their employees while closing temporarily or reducing business hours due to business contraction. In addition, we are helping business owners with reduced sales to continue their businesses by providing them with cash benefits, such as rent subsidy.

Deterioration of economy and employment situation have a significant impact especially on vulnerable people. We established subsidy programs for business owners who provided paid leave for pregnant workers and for working parents taking care of their children due to school closures. This has allowed workers to take leave without feeling anxious about their livelihoods. We are collecting comments and proposals from those who are supporting vulnerable people at the frontline, such as non-governmental organizations and social workers, so as to expand our support capacity for single parent families, non-regular workers, people with disabilities and those in need.

This crisis can also be an opportunity to build a sustainable future of work in the mid- to long-term. For instance, with government impetus, telework has been rapidly increasing in both the public and private sectors. By taking appropriate solutions for identified issues, we need to create an environment where people can work more comfortably and effectively.

Japan requests the ILO to strongly promote development cooperation and to encourage social dialogue to promote public consensus, while focusing on overcoming this crisis and building a better future of work. Japan will continue to play a leading role in the ILO. Ministers and representatives of the social partners, in the face of adversity,

let us combine our wisdom and strengths and build a better future of work together.

Thank you for your attention.