

Keynote address by the Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japan
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11th Bled Strategic Forum
Panel Discussion "*Human Security: You and I Matter*"

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First of all, I would like to thank Mr. Kovacič for your kind introduction. Honorable Minister of Foreign Affairs Samaraweera from Sri Lanka, Distinguished Delegates, ladies and gentlemen, good morning. It is my great pleasure to be here at the 11th Bled Strategic Forum today.

I would also like to thank the Government of the Republic of Slovenia, especially Slovenian Ambassador Leskovar in Tokyo with her strong recommendation to come, for giving me this opportunity to come to the most beautiful part of Slovenia, Bled.

This is my second visit to Slovenia since I first visited the country 11 years ago as a Senior Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs and the first visit after I took on the chairmanship of Japan-Slovenia Parliamentarians' Friendship League, and also the first participation as a Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan in the Forum.

On this occasion, I would like to deliver a few words on our continuing efforts to enhance human security.

In order to understand why Japan has come to focus on human security as one of the integral parts of its foreign policy and international cooperation, let me take you back to some 70 years into the past, when Japan's present constitution was promulgated after the devastating Second World War. With deep repentance for the war that claimed millions of precious lives across the border, our postwar constitution renounces war.

With the support of the international community, Japan rapidly recovered from the ruins of the war, and only 9 years after the war ended, Japan started offering Official Development Assistance overseas. Its budget

continued to increase until the 1990s, when it became evident that besides constructing infrastructure, human and community development is indispensable to ensure individual lives and well-being.

In the meantime, the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and Somalia and other regions suffered humanitarian tragedies in the 1990s. International community was faced with the situations in which no sovereign state exists to protect the dignity of the people in these tragedies.

Against this backdrop, Japan upheld human security and set it as an integral part of its foreign policy and international cooperation since 2000. Now, Japan places emphasis on protection and empowerment of people with the determination to safeguard their freedom and dignity.

Health is essential for human security in two ways. First, everyone's well-being is directly built upon their health; and second, health is essential for a person to pursue the life goals they value as an individual. Shifting the focus of development to the health of individuals, and protection of families and communities is therefore crucial for human security.

A good example of Japan's contribution to human security is the Global Fund, founded in 2002, designed to accelerate the end of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria as epidemics. Japan's leadership on infectious diseases at the G8 Kyushu-Okinawa summit of 2000 directly led to the establishment of this initiative, which has thus far saved over 20 million lives.

Having experienced ghastly conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and the growing refugee and migration challenges, Slovenia too has seen the value of human security and the consequences of its erosion.

I strongly believe that both Japan and Slovenia share similar experiences and values. We have experienced the suffering of humanitarian crises and fully understand the importance of peace and security for individuals. We now share the basic fundamental values including freedom, human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Building on these values, we both promote concerted efforts to advance human security.

As an example of these strong ties between Japan and Slovenia, consider the demining project in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia.

Through this project, over 200 thousand people have been freed from the threats of landmines, and can lead peaceful daily lives. This is a testament to our shared belief in the value of human security.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As an advocate of human security, Japan is determined to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs, which was adopted at the UN General Assembly in 2015. The SDGs clearly enshrine the principles of human security through two important concepts, the “people-centered approach” and “leaving no one behind.”

The SDGs include numerous health-related targets including the achievement of Universal Health Coverage, or UHC. Our Prime Minister Abe has been vigorously advocating the importance of UHC, and it was high on the health agenda at the G7 Ise-Shima summit in May this year. UHC embodies a very core concept of human security by ensuring that “all people can receive the basic quality services they need, and are protected from health threats at an affordable cost.” Thus, UHC contributes directly to furthering human security.

Many people sitting here today may recall the Ebola crisis in West Africa in 2014. It was another serious threat to human security that took well over ten thousand lives. The outbreak left the global community with a crucial lesson that resilient health systems and progress towards UHC are the cornerstone of protecting people from global health threats.

Two weeks ago, the Japanese Government hosted the sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development, or TICAD VI, in Kenya, for the first time in Africa. In the conference, I had the privilege of chairing a session on UHC. It was reassuring to see the collective will of African leaders to attain UHC for the human-centered development of the continent. Japan will continue to commit to promote UHC in Africa and other regions, in the spirit of enhancing human security globally.

Finally, I would like to touch upon the population aging issue as a common challenge to sustaining UHC. Currently the proportion of people aged 65 years and above is 26% in Japan, the world’s highest, and 18% in Slovenia, and they are expected to reach 36% and 33% respectively in 2050, which means Slovenia will age much faster than Japan from now on. Health systems must prepare, well ahead of the time, for this demographic challenge and its consequences for the society.

It is urgent for us to develop a system to meet the needs of the elderly population including those with dementia. In Japan, we are in the process of establishing a community-based integrated care system, which provides comprehensive care in a coordinated manner.

This morning I had a chance to visit the Community Health Center Ljubljana, where I was so impressed by the health care providers who are doing their best to meet the diverse needs of the elderly. There is much we can learn from each other on our common challenges, and Japan will continue to share lessons learned from our experiences, and continue to learn from the global community.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As a long standing partner of Slovenia and the region, and as a Health Minister in charge of protecting individual lives and well-being, I will commit myself together with all of you to achieve and sustain UHC globally based on the concept of human security. With knowledge, passion and commitment, I am confident that, together, we can make a huge difference towards a healthier and more peaceful world.

Thank you.