



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

### Statement submitted by International Women’s Year Liaison Group, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

International Women's Year Liaison group would like to present our statement on how Japanese women are still understood by the Japanese Government as subordinate to the head of the household who are dominantly male. We suspect it to be the conscious bias that is built into our social norm and which is preventing Japanese women's full and effective participation and decision-making in all aspects of our lives, public and private, and has taken enormous efforts of those individual women who are presently participating in the public sphere.

It all became apparent with the Government policy regarding covid-19. We sincerely applauded the announcement by the Government, in April 2020, that it will distribute 12.7 trillion yen (approximately 118 billion USD at 20 April 2020) to all residents of Japan as a stimulus to shrinking economic activities. Everyone was to receive one hundred thousand yen (approximately 927 USD). It eventually transpired that the money will be remitted, not to individuals, but to a bank account designated by the head of the household who shall receive the money on behalf of all members thereof.

This manner of distribution does not guarantee that entitled persons will actually have access to the money. If the head of the household decides not to receive the money, for whatever reasons, the rest of the household will be unable to apply for the one-time stipend and deprived of the opportunity to receive it, without notice or consent. It overlooks the fact that there are those who are hiding from their partners because of domestic violence and other family troubles. Widely criticized of the serious impact this manner of distribution would have upon the victims of domestic violence, this defect was eventually redressed. There are couples on the verge of divorce, if not just separated. Those people are usually not on speaking terms with each other and even with a vastly stretched imagination, one cannot expect the recipient to be good enough to hand the precious 100,000 yen over to the other person however entitled the other might be. If such did happen, they probably would not have separated.

Japan enjoyed economic prosperity in the 1960's when television commercials blared "Can you work twenty-four hours a day?" It is now the victim of its own success as society cannot abandon the male breadwinner and female home-maker model. Today, about two-thirds of all households are two-income families. The method of distribution ignores the reality of household financial management which simply assume that the head of the household manages it all. This is not the only occasion where household, not individual, is the unit by which Government provides welfare and other services.

Another way of enforcing this contemporary patriarchy is to discourage women from becoming taxpayers and responsible citizens, the apparent tax policy is to nudge women to be and remain financially dependent on marriage. The justification is the supposedly effective division of labor between man, being compensated for working in the so-called public sphere, and woman, shouldering the unpaid and invisible work of daily and generational reproduction in the privacy of home. As women are welcomed into workforce, most people, men and women, assume that she shall work and earn some money, but not really enough to be financially independent, and also shall bear the lion's share of chores at home: what we call the double shifts.

Current statistics show that Japanese women in their thirties spend 6.2 times as much time for domestic chores, childcare and other care works at home while Japanese men of the same age cohort spend 1.9 times as much at work, according to the White Paper published by the Gender Equality Bureau of Japanese Cabinet Office. Yes, it is the chicken or egg situation: men cannot share the bulk of work at home

because they work unbelievably long hours, they can only work long hours because there are someone at home doing the bulk of work there. If women were to work long hours like men, they would have to look for someone to do those work at home, which is difficult to find as well as psychologically hard for many women who are conditioned to see themselves as failures as women if they asked others to shoulder some of their burden. In short, women are led to believe they are living up to the social expectation by becoming financially dependent. This social norm works to the advantage of husbands who eventually will receive higher pensions and to the clear disadvantage of dependent wives who have forfeited their own old-age pensions and their financial independence.

In 2018, the Diet, our legislative branch, enacted the Act to Promote Gender Equality in Political Field which encourages political parties to select the same number of male and female candidates to elections of the members of the House of Representatives, the House of Councilors, and other representative entities of local governments. The act is the fruit of coordinated efforts of many NGOs in persuading legislators across the board, the importance of sufficient female participation in politics. As often is the case, the legislation gently nudges political leaders to select female candidates but without any penalties for not doing so, and parties in power did get away with selecting less than fifteen percent of their candidates being women, for example for the 2019 election of the House of Councilors. The most frequent excuse we noticed was that women are unlikely to be elected and there were few qualified women as candidates. Are female candidates not taken seriously? Is politics not a suitable job for women? As it appears difficult to alter old customs and ways by just gently nudging, the next step might be setting quota for different groups to ensure their diverse representations at all levels or to introduce alternating system between male and female for the listing of candidates. Such steps are the only way to remedy our Global Gender Gap Index ranking of the World Economic Forum.

In 2016, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women invited our legislature to take necessary steps to implement issues which had been recommended on previous occasions and to which the legislature has not lived up to the expectation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women: namely, to domesticate the Convention by introducing a comprehensive definition of discrimination against women in public and private spheres which will also cover multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination against women belonging to various minority groups, to establish an independent national human rights institution in accordance with the Paris Principles, and to adopt the Optional Protocol. There have been some progress in the areas of equal pay for equal work (in 2020) and of equal age for marriage (expected to be effective in 2022), but harassment in workplaces and elsewhere is not prohibited as a crime, and equal opportunity for education was denied by universities themselves under not-evidence-based but socially acceptable explanation that a large number of female doctors leave their work on pregnancy, deliverance and childcare.

Introduction of a selective family name procedure to give choice to those who wish to retain their pre-marriage family names, for example, seems not so difficult a suggestion to implement, as it does not coerce those who do not agree. The draft bill has been proposed more than a quarter of a century ago, and opinion polls suggest that the majority of the population is in favor of adopting the measure. Nevertheless, the idea has been attacked as it will destroy the gendered structure of society. We, as members of civil society have been working hard to remind the Government to do their homework and follow these essential recommendations of the Committee. We truly believe that the dawn is not that far away.

We, International Women's Year Liaison Group, sincerely believe that unconscious bias ingrained in our social norm is one huge obstacle to our full and

effective participation in all aspects of our lives. It is not only the Government but possibly ourselves as well who might harbor one form of bias or another. Various voices from younger generations indicate that they are well aware of the danger of unconscious bias. By aspiring for a better society of “Equality, Development and Peace”, we trust that we can unearth troublesome unconscious bias and accomplish full participation of women and men to build that equal society.

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