

Please check against delivery



JAPAN

Statement by Mr. Itsunori ONODERA

Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Japan

Opening Statement

61st Session of the Commission on Human Rights

Geneva, 16 March 2005

Permanent Mission of Japan in Geneva

Mr. Chairperson,
The High Commissioner for Human Rights,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to speak on behalf of the Government of Japan at the outset of this sixty-first session of the Commission on Human Rights.

First of all, I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to Dr. Makarim Wibisono, a prominent and experienced Ambassador of Indonesia, on your assumption of the office of chairperson. As an Asian member state, Japan fully supports and looks forward to collaborating with you to make this a successful session.

I would also like to pay tribute to Madame Louise Arbour, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, for her leadership and devotion for the promotion and protection of human rights internationally. We had the pleasure of receiving her in Japan last November and we were satisfied with the constructive discussion we had there.

Mr. Chairperson,

The need is widely shared among Member States to reform our work in the field of human rights. This year presents a special occasion to make progress as we address the reform of the United Nations. The report by the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change contains recommendations to this end, including the reform of this Commission. The report has contributed to activating the discussions on this issue, and numerous interesting ideas have been presented, such as drawing a division of labour between the Commission on Human Rights and the General Assembly. Japan is carefully considering the various proposals on the table, but has yet to formulate its position on concrete methods of reform. Nevertheless, the principle in our consideration is clear. Any reform must have as its objective the enhancement of our ability to promote and protect human rights effectively in every part of the world. We should try our best to avoid spending too much time on unfruitful negotiation over the choice of language which has little impact on actual human rights situations. Also, unnecessary duplication both in intergovernmental bodies, as well as within the Secretariat, needs to be avoided. Japan will develop further its concrete position based on this principle and stands ready to actively participate in the discussions.

Mr. Chairperson,

Japan firmly believes that human rights are universal. The notions of good governance, non-discrimination, the rule of law, and democracy are universally shared. The Commission on Human Rights has been instrumental in bringing this awareness to all of us. Yet despite this universal awareness and the efforts of the international community and the OHCHR, grave human rights violations still occur throughout the world.

Japan fully recognizes the importance of an appropriate understanding of each country's history, culture, religion and tradition when the international community seeks real progress. Based on this conviction, Japan has sought approaches tailored to each circumstance through dialogue, cooperation and, where useful, assistance to those states who are sincerely doing their best. However, in cases where a government ignores the good will of the international community and does not make the slightest effort towards improvement, we cannot sit idly by.

Mr. Chairperson,

Japan shares deep concern about the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, which was explicitly shown in the CHR resolutions of the past two years. They specifically pointed out reports of systematic, widespread and grave violations of human rights, including torture and forced labour.

Let me remind you here that last year's resolution specifically called upon the DPRK to resolve the issue relating to the abduction of foreigners, including Japanese nationals. These abductions are a grave and flagrant violation of human dignity, human rights and fundamental freedoms, and should be addressed by the international community as a whole. It is unacceptable, however, that the DPRK has been responding unfaithfully to repeated requests for resolving this issue. The Government of Japan has already announced that Japan will take stringent measures toward the DPRK if its attitude remains unfaithful and unacceptable. Japan strongly requests the DPRK to resolve this issue by returning the abductees immediately and providing satisfactory explanations about the cases, as well as to improve the human rights situation.

The DPRK has consistently refused to accept the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK and to cooperate on his visit. Japan expresses its deep concern about the DPRK not cooperating positively with the relevant international human rights institutions, and calls upon the DPRK to respond to

requests from the international community and to cooperate fully and unconditionally with the relevant international human rights institutions, including the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances and the OHCHR.

Japan expects that the CHR will adopt a resolution on the situation of human rights in the DPRK again this year, and calls for support from the international community in this regard.

Mr. Chairperson,

In the twenty-first century, there are growing threats which violate or affect people's full enjoyment of human rights, such as the internationalization of internal conflicts, terrorism, HIV/AIDS or other infectious diseases or natural disasters. However, they are not sufficiently addressed through the traditional framework of governance. In this context, Japan attaches importance to the protection and empowerment of each and every individual, in other words, the promotion of "human security", a concept which embraces all aspects of threats to human lives.

Mr. Chairperson,

I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate, on behalf of the Government of Japan, our deepest condolences and sympathy to those who suffered from the recent tsunami disaster.

Facing this severe humanitarian threat, Japan is providing assistance to the maximum extent possible in three ways: financial resources, up to \$500 (five hundred) million (dollars) of grant money; knowledge and expertise; and human resources. Japan is implementing the "Child Support Plan for Tsunami Victims", especially focusing on child protection and child survival, including measures against child trafficking and infectious diseases.

Mr. Chairperson,

The Government of Japan recognizes the significance of protecting and promoting the rights of children and recently ratified the two Optional Protocols on the Convention of the Rights of the Child. We are determined to implement these Protocols and hope that the ratification of these Protocols will enhance the awareness of the public on the importance of the Rights of the Child.

Japan also gives priority to the promotion of rights of women. In early March, Japan announced the "Initiative on Gender and Development" at the forty-ninth

Commission on the Status of Women, which was held to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.

At the same time, the Government of Japan adopted a comprehensive action plan of measures to combat trafficking in persons in December last year. Japan will continue to make the utmost efforts domestically and internationally to combat trafficking in persons.

Mr. Chairperson,

Japan also recognizes the importance of protecting and promoting the rights of persons with disabilities. We shall continue our cooperation with the efforts to formulate a strong and effective convention, which will obtain the broadest possible support of the international community and be implemented effectively.

Mr. Chairperson,

We believe that human rights education, in which everyone learns tolerance and respect for others, is of great importance for building a decent, peaceful and prosperous society where the human rights of every individual are respected naturally. Therefore, we welcome the launching of the World Programme for Human Rights Education in January this year and continue to make efforts to promote human rights education.

Mr. Chairperson,

The protection and promotion of human rights remains a constant challenge, one that requires our untiring vigilance and ceaseless efforts. It is only in our ability to adapt to new challenges, to be fluid in our approach and dynamic in our endeavours, that we will truly be able to succeed in fulfilling our mandate. First and foremost what is required is unity and cooperation. Let's make this world a better one through our concerted endeavours for our children and our future. Thank you.