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Statement by Dr. Yoriko Meguro
Representative of Japan

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Mr. Chairperson,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government of Japan, I would like to thank you, Mr. Chair, and other members of the Bureau for playing an important role to facilitate and organize the discussion, as you did last year.

Mr. Chairperson,

The priority theme for this year, “Equal Sharing of Responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS” is the core issue in discussing gender equality. It has been pointed out that stereotyped notion of gender roles – not limited to caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS – puts disproportionate impacts on women, deprives women of opportunities including income generation, and prevents women from establishing the base for their independence.

The issue of HIV/AIDS is, in itself, a substantial challenge in social development. We have, however, reaffirmed on various occasions that this issue is even more serious when looked at in gender perspective. For example, women and girls are not only vulnerable to HIV/AIDS due to insufficient access to prevention measures and treatment, but also bear the disproportionate burden as main caregivers to those affected by HIV/AIDS.

Mr. Chairperson,

With a view to realizing a gender-equal society, in Japan, the Cabinet approved the Basic Plan for Gender Equality based on the Basic Law for a Gender-equal Society and the government promotes relevant measures in a comprehensive and systematic manner.

Awareness-raising activities on gender roles are among such measures. A recent poll shows that more than half of the respondents were against the notion of “husbands as breadwinners and wives as caregivers”. Thus, people’s perceptions are changing.

Unfortunately, however, unequal gender division of responsibilities continues to exist. In Japan, data shows that women spend seven times longer time than men per day for domestic work, although the difference is on the decrease. Also, with regard to caregiving to the family members, roughly 80% is on women’s shoulders in terms of total hours spent. Equal sharing of responsibilities is also essential in coping with the problem of declining fertility and aging of our society. At the end of 2007, the “Council of Public and Private Sectors to Promote Work-Life Balance” consisting of relevant ministers and representatives of business community, labor circle and local governments decided on Charter for Work-Life Balance and the Action Policy for Promoting Work-Life Balance. The Action Policy contains specific numerical targets including on time to be spent for child-raising and housework by men who have children under age 6. The government, in partnership with the private sector, is going to work on such undertakings as putting a curb on long working hours and improving child care and family care leave system, so that both women and men can find their choice of balancing various activities such as work, family life and community activities.

Mr. Chairperson,

As a domestic policy with regard to HIV/AIDS, Japan is promoting such measures as dissemination of knowledge about HIV/AIDS including through education, improvement of counselling and testing systems and rebuilding of the system to provide medical services. In parallel with these domestic efforts, Japan has put a great effort in the field of international cooperation. Japan has contributed to global efforts to fight HIV/AIDS, including through contribution to the Global Fund, which is achieving major results in scaling up efforts against HIV/AIDS as well as steady implementation of Health and Development Initiative (HDI) announced in 2005. For example, Japan is assisting in enhancing prevention, counselling and testing systems for HIV/AIDS through bilateral technical cooperation such as assistance for “HIV/AIDS Regional Coordination Center” in Thailand. Furthermore, by utilizing Japan-UNDP Partnership Fund, Japan has conducted “Creating an enabling policy and institutional framework for effective Home-based Care” project in 6 African states since last year. This project focuses on “home-based care”, which is mainly carried out by women, thus assisting women to empower themselves.

At last year's TICAD IV, Japan pointed out the importance of gender equality such as advancement and protection of women's rights and empowerment of women, and took up global health including addressing infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS as an important issue. At the G8 Hokkaido Toyako Summit, Japan, as chair, released "Toyako Framework for Action on Global Health", which clearly stipulated the importance of efforts by G8 to address the issue of health and set up a mechanism to follow up past G8 commitments. Japan will remain committed to cooperation to fight HIV/AIDS, acknowledging the significance of gender mainstreaming in the context of development.

Mr. Chairperson,

This year, the Commission took up a very timely theme, "The gender perspectives of the financial crisis." Japan is no exception in terms of deteriorating economic situation stemming from last year's financial crisis. Dismissal of non-regular workers and the increasing unemployment rate are becoming social problems. However, we need to recall that, even before the financial crisis, more than half of female workers were non-regular workers who were facing low wages and insecure work conditions. Various negative impacts of the financial crisis could impose heavier burdens on women than men, and a gender perspective is vital in getting out of the crisis as well as restoring the society.

Mr. Chairperson,

2009 is an extremely important year for Japan, since it marks not only the 30th anniversary of the adoption of CEDAW, but also the 10th anniversary of the enactment of the Basic Law for a Gender-equal Society. "Equal Sharing of Responsibilities between women and men" is an universal and fundamental theme in discussing gender equality. The Government of Japan acknowledges the wisdom of the Commission for choosing this theme and would like to reflect the outcome of this session on our own efforts towards the realization of a gender-equal society. I would like to conclude my remarks by reiterating that the Government of Japan will further enhance its partnership with international society, international organizations, and civil society, including NGOs, in order to achieve the advancement of the status of women.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.