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Keynote Speech

A Geriatric Peace:

Democracy and Demography in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Kuniko INOBUCHI, Ph.D.

Member, House of Representatives of Japan

Member, Science Council of Japan

Former Minister of State for Gender Equality and Social Affairs

Excellencies, Distinguished Scholars, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure and honor to address this distinguished audience this morning. I would like to wholeheartedly congratulate the able organizers of this thought-provoking symposium on East Asia and social policy. Professor Takegawa pioneers social policy study and comparative study in Japan, and it is my special honor to participate in the symposium on his behalf. It is also my great honor to speak in the attendance of distinguished representatives with whom I had the honor to exchange views during my ministerial visit to the Republic of Korea in 2006. As former and first ever exclusive Japanese Minister of State on Gender Equality and Social Affairs, I am most delighted to share with you some of my thoughts on the importance of mainstreaming social policies, and how that could advance peace and security in East Asia.

Despite being the world's second-largest economy, Japan is placed 42<sup>nd</sup> out of 75 countries when ranked by the proportion of women active in political and economic decision-making. Demographically, we face the

challenges of a shrinking, aging society. Clearly we must promote a better work-life balance and provide enhanced childcare services so that men and women can participate equally in public, private, as well as family spheres.

Contrary to popular arguments, there is a strong positive correlation between women's participation in the labor force and the total fertility rate of a society. A greater presence of women in the workforce generates stronger incentives for policies, products, and services that support families with children. Also at issue in Japan are the long hours and inflexible working practices that limit the amount of time men can spend on household chores and childcare.

In 2006, I chaired the East Asia Gender Equality Ministerial Meeting, the first conference of its kind to discuss gender equality and the empowerment of women in this region. Despite differences in levels of economic development and cultural, religious, and political contexts, the 16 governments and 2 international organizations in attendance achieved consensus on the need to overcome the feminization of poverty and stereotypical gender roles. The means agreed upon were to invigorate national machineries and local focal points, to build capacities for the collection and interpretation of gender statistics, and to promote gender-sensitive budgeting to bring these perspectives into macro- and microeconomic frameworks.

Population aging and diversity issues carry important implications for world peace. First, a shrinking workforce provides the opportunity to import labor. If managed prudently, this fosters interdependence and cross-cultural sensitivity. Second, graying democracies are more likely to favor diplomatic solutions over war—not only because of their maturity, but also because the fiscal costs of aging effectively preclude defense budget increases. Third, a declining and aging population compels Japan to rethink its modern growth paradigm of a male mainstream workforce. Women with children, senior citizens, and

handicapped persons must be given due attention as an integral part of dynamic economic and social development. A growth paradigm with a philosophy of inclusion and balance could be argued to be more likely to correlate with multilateral diplomatic efforts than other external options. These multifaceted impacts of graying in democracies could be conceptualized as ‘geriatric peace’.

Today we are in need of strong political leadership and effective academic breakthroughs to lead our societies toward a new level of social and diplomatic development. To provide solutions for emerging and persistent local, domestic, regional, and global challenges, given their magnitude, political leadership at all levels—international, regional, national, and local—needs to be enhanced and supported by the expertise and knowledge of civil and academic societies. Governments today have come under increasing pressure to address and respond to a wide range of complex global institutions. The power of knowledge has become increasingly more important, and this is why civil society, including scholars, researchers, think-tanks, non-profit organizations, media, and all interested citizens, are important partners in the decision-making process. Governments, in order to be effective and powerful, will find a greater incentive to reach out to civil society to make use of knowledge, including local knowledge that belongs to the people.

Contact information: Kuniko INOBUCHI, Ph.D.

Room 541, First Members’ Offices, House of Representatives

Phone +813-3508-7271 Fax +813-3508-3130