

[Opening Session]

Opening Remarks by Hiroki Owaki

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1. Introduction

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, one of the co-organizers of this program, it is my great pleasure to welcome all of you to the Japan Education Forum (JEF) VII.

2. Toward 2015 and Beyond

With only five years remaining until the target year of 2015, this year will be a milestone to achieve the goals of Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). According to the most recent EFA Global Monitoring Report published just two weeks ago, some progress has been witnessed in some regions such as sub-Saharan African increasing enrolment rates for primary education and narrowing the gender gap. However, with this pace of progress, it is difficult to achieve the goals by 2015. The report states that “business as usual would leave 56 million children out of school in 2015” and that “a total of 10.3 million additional teachers will be needed worldwide”. Furthermore, there is concern that the recent world economic slowdown may adversely affect the ODA budgets of developed countries, as well as the education budgets and learning opportunities for disadvantaged people including the poor and women in developing countries.

Under these circumstances, the international community has been actively undertaking discussions for strengthening educational assistance. Particularly this year, many important meetings on education are scheduled to be held. Later this month, the 9th meeting of the high-level group on EFA will take place in Ethiopia, where representatives of governments, international agencies and NGOs will discuss the impact of the economic crisis on education, and of the marginalization. The G8 meeting will be held in June, and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals summit in September.

We believe this forum will provide an important opportunity to discuss the “educational challenges toward 2015 and beyond” by inviting the leaders working on the front lines in the field of international cooperation in education. Japan will continue to contribute to the improvement of the education of the world. Based on the outcomes of today’s discussions and opinions expressed at this forum, Japan is determined to make its international cooperation more effective and relevant to the diverse needs of developing countries.

3. Japan’s Educational Cooperation

Education is a fundamental human right that everyone is entitled to have. It is essential in various areas in the field of development, such as reducing poverty, improving maternal and child health, and strengthening democracy. Education also fosters understanding of other people and different cultures, promotes international mutual understanding, and contributes to building peace that respects coexistence. In addition, today, we face new challenges, such as conflicts, climate change and pandemics, which cannot be solved within each national framework or by regional response. To address these challenges, human security which emphasizes a people-centered view of security is necessary. Today, educational assistance has become even more important to achieve human security of which pillars

are the protection and the capacity development of communities and individuals.

Japan is offering assistance, in which it takes a well-balanced approach between primary education and other levels of education, by improving both the quality and quantity of basic education, expanding higher education and vocational training, and receiving students from overseas, while emphasizing the priorities of developing countries and their self-help efforts and development. Education is also closely related to different issues of development, such as health, water and sanitation, gender, and so on. Therefore, by implementing cross-sectoral assistance, Japan tries to produce high synergetic effects, by strengthening ties with other areas. We must not curtail our efforts to achieve MDGs and the goals of EFA, even in this economic downturn. Based on this common understanding, by closely collaborating with international agencies, NGOs, universities and other partners, we would like to further promote our cooperation initiatives.

4. In Closing

Finally, I sincerely hope that lively discussions on the international cooperation in educational development will take place during today's forum and that the participants will have productive discussions on future cooperation in education.

Thank you very much.

