Reply of the Government of Japan to the Request for Information from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

In response to the Request for Information sent on August 14, 2020 from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to the Permanent Mission of Japan to the International Organizations in Geneva, the Government of Japan (GoJ) provides the following information.

1. Basic Policies for Covid-19 Control

The Basic Policies for Covid-19 Control (decided on and revised on May 25, 2020 by the Novel Coronavirus Response Headquarters established under the GoJ) mention the following points in regard to consideration for human rights and response to social issues, etc.

1.1 Given that all people can potentially be infected with COVID-19, it is extremely important to prevent a situation where information about infection status causes people to have a negative impression of specific individuals or areas. In particular, there have been cases of human rights violations against people including patients, infected persons, their family members, and persons engaging in treatment and infection prevention measures. The GoJ will therefore make appropriate efforts to prevent such cases.

1.2 The GoJ will take necessary measures for students temporarily returning from overseas, including providing assistance for acceptance to schools and prevention of bullying.

1.3 When implementing various measures, the GoJ and relevant organizations should ensure that those measures only restrict the freedom and rights of people to the minimum extent necessary and pay sufficient attention to the impacts of those measures on women and people with disabilities.

1.4 The GoJ will take necessary measures, including awareness-raising, to prevent reputational damage to medical personnel engaging in infection prevention measures.

1.5 The GoJ and local governments will take necessary measures to avoid or curb panic-buying, withholding sales, and price hikes of masks, personal protective equipment, medicines, quasi-pharmaceutical products, and food.

1.6 The GoJ, in collaboration with local governments, will provide appropriate support in response to various social issues arising from extended prevention measures related to:

- impacts of staying at home for prolonged periods on mental health, spousal violence, and child abuse;

- consideration for ensuring balance between information disclosure and protection of human rights;

- bankruptcy, unemployment, and suicide due to refraining from doing business;

- lives of the elderly (who are generally prone to social isolation) and single-parent families whose businesses have been temporarily closed; and

- ensuring health control and care services for elderly persons who are refraining from leaving their homes.

1.7 The GoJ and local governments will inform the public on appropriate ways of mourning with dignity and cremating persons who have lost their lives due to infection with COVID-19.

2. Good practices

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 2.1. Awareness-raising activities

In a public video message, the Minister of Justice emphasized that that there will be no tolerance of COVID-19-related discrimination and prejudice against medical personnel and their families, infected persons and their institutions, and foreign nationals living in Japan.

In addition, the Ministry of Justice is carrying out various awareness-raising activities, such as posting information on social media and the MoJ’s website, to prevent discrimination and prejudice and domestic violence and abuse related to COVID-19 and to promote a human rights counseling service in case of human rights violations.

2.2. Activities for children

The GoJ believes that children’s safety should be ensured, regardless of the environment they live in, and that they should retain the same level of access to education as they had in the pre-COVID-19 era.

In Japan, as school closures and voluntary stay-at-home have been continuing in some areas, there have been fewer opportunities to watch over children, which helps increase the risk of child abuse. To address this risk, we have been carrying out a “Reinforced Action Plan to Watch over Children” to ensure that child abuse is promptly detected and addressed by mobilizing local networks and establishing mechanisms to more frequently watch over children who are most in need of help.

With this Action Plan, we are conducting visits or making phone calls to targeted children and pregnant women at least once a week in order to monitor the situation and provide support or take measures as needed.

In light of concerns about the increase in human rights violation related to COVID-19, the Minister of Justice has announced in a video message that the human rights bodies of the Ministry of Justice provide the “Children's Rights Hotline,” which is a special telephone service for human rights counseling for children.

In addition, on SNS etc., the GoJ has widely publicized the fact that the human rights bodies of the Ministry of Justice provide various human rights counseling services, including counseling on prejudice, discrimination, and bullying related to COVID-19.

2.3. Activities for women

The GoJ launched a new domestic violence (DV) counseling and support service mechanism named “DV Counseling Plus” in response to the escalation of domestic violence as a result of the restrictions imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, this counseling service mechanism provides various counseling tools such as a counseling service via a 24-hour-helpline, chat using social media, e-mails and web interviews, as well as a multilingual counseling service in 10 languages. On top of that, the new mechanism provides victims with protection support and someone to accompany them on visits to relevant agencies, such as consultation centers, the police, or law firms.

In order to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the GoJ is taking measures to subsidize necessary expenses to provide consultation support at the Women’s Counseling Offices using videoconferencing and SNS, to establish a system for contacting and coordination by online conferencing, to purchase masks and disinfectant for infection prevention, and to secure space to avoid close contact with other people.

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