

High-level Segment of the Human Rights Council at its Fourth Session
Statement by Mr. Masayoshi Hamada,
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Mr. President,
Madam High Commissioner for Human Rights,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to make a statement on behalf of the Government of Japan at the fourth session of the Human Rights Council. First of all, we would like to commend the efforts of Ambassador de Alba, who shoulders important and difficult duties as the first president of the Human Rights Council.

We would also like to express our appreciation to High Commissioner Arbour and the OHCHR for their contributions. In January, we had the privilege of inviting Madame Arbour to Japan, and we are pleased with the constructive discussion that took place.

Mr. President,

Japan recently added a new pillar to its foreign policy. In November 2006, our Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, Mr. Taro Aso, in a speech entitled "The Arc of Freedom and Prosperity," announced that Japan will place greater emphasis on universal values such as human rights, the rule of law, and democracy. In particular, Minister Aso expressed that, along the outer rim of the Eurasian Continent, Japan wishes to do its part to support the development of a prosperous and stable region where such fundamental values will take root. This is based on the lessons learned from Japan's experience that societies which have achieved human security -- societies where each and every person can realize their ambitions freely and live happily under a democratic system that guarantees basic human rights -- are indeed the societies which are politically stable and economically prosperous.

Mr. President,

Japan has achieved a prosperous, peaceful, and free society not simply by ushering in a modern civilization based on science and technology, but also by accepting values such as human rights and democracy, allowing them to take root, and making them the building blocks of our society. Japan wishes to share our experience with countries in which human rights and democracy are about to take root and also wishes to make a greater contribution to the building of a peaceful and stable international community. This is precisely the message that we tried to incorporate into our new foreign policy. Of course, this is not an attempt to impose our values, but to keep in mind the differences in culture, history, and the stage of development among nations, while placing

emphasis on ownership by each country. We see ourselves not as the "front-runner" of a marathon that is leading the pack but as a co-runner, running alongside the young democracies. Our wish is to work side-by-side with these countries for the realization of universal values by, for instance, improving their human rights situation or promoting democratization.

Mr. President,

As part of our commitment to put into practice this diplomacy that places emphasis on universal values, Japan made its first contribution this month to the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF) in the amount of 10 million U.S. dollars. Through this Fund, Japan hopes to contribute to the efforts of the international community to consolidate democracy.

Mr. President,

Throughout the world, the mainstreaming of human rights is making steady progress. In this regard, our diplomacy, which places emphasis on universal values, is also in step with the global movement. Meanwhile, the Human Rights Council is currently at a critical crossroads in terms of whether or not it will be able to establish a mechanism that will live up to the expectations entrusted to it by the international community. The Human Rights Council should be a realistic and effective organ that contributes to the improvement of the human rights situation in the field. Japan intends to actively participate in the discussions on the development of the Council. Specifically, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism, which ought to be one of the essential pillars of the Human Rights Council, should be an equal and efficient process, while at the same time being an effective process. "Dialogue and cooperation" will be the basic approach, but the Council must embody an appropriate follow-up mechanism in order to be able to deal with countries that refuse to cooperate, as well as to respond to various other situations including continuous human rights violations. Should the Human Rights Council be devoid of effective means, its function could regress and it may lose credibility as the UN's core organ in the field of human rights.

Mr. President,

From a similar viewpoint, Japan believes that the country-specific resolutions on the situation of human rights and the country-specific rapporteur mechanism, which the international community has been advancing to date, are among the indispensable means for the Human Rights Council. For grave violations of human rights for which the "dialogue and cooperation" approach does not work, it is important to ensure measures with a view to responding promptly and flexibly to these situations. For example, the special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK is making sincere efforts to improve the DPRK's human rights situation even as the DPRK refuses to accept the visit of the rapporteur. Serious human rights violations continue in the DPRK, and the issue of abduction of the nationals of multiple countries, including Japanese nationals, by the DPRK remains unresolved. The DPRK authorities, while admitting the fact that they abducted Japanese citizens in the past, have failed to provide sufficient information about the 12 missing abductees in spite of the grief of the

affected families. At the First Session of the Working Group on the Normalization of Japan-DPRK relations which took place on March 7th and 8th, the DPRK did not show a sincere response towards the resolution of the abduction issue. It is regrettable that the DPRK took such a stance. Japan once again strongly urges the DPRK to make serious efforts to resolve the abduction issue and requests the DPRK to ensure the safety of all abductees, return them immediately, provide a full account, and hand over the suspects of the abductions.

The UN General Assembly resolution on the situation of human rights in the DPRK adopted last year provides that the abduction of foreign nationals is a violation of the human rights of the nationals of other sovereign countries and is an international concern. It is essential for the international community to coordinate and cooperate as well as demonstrate a united front in order to urge the DPRK to resolve the issue of abduction of foreign nationals.

In February of this year, I signed the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance at a signing ceremony that was held in Paris. Japan hopes that the signing of this Convention by 57 countries will build a momentum and further raise international concern over the resolution of the issue of enforced disappearance, including abduction.

Mr. President,

I would like to mention that today, in this conference room, a representative of the family members of the abductees is observing these deliberations. Japan reiterates our strong hope that the Human Rights Council will assist in their earnest desire.

Mr. President and Distinguished Delegates,

“Dialogue and cooperation” and “the viewpoint of the protection of vulnerable groups” form the cornerstone of Japan’s human rights diplomacy. First, Japan sincerely hopes that, through the persistent dialogue of all members, the Human Rights Council will reach an early agreement on the organization and working methods of the Council that will be acceptable to all parties. Second, in accordance with our new foreign policy that I discussed at the outset, Japan will engage in broad cooperation through joint initiatives with other nations, also keeping in mind long-term perspectives such as human resources development. Third, Japan will endeavor to protect and empower vulnerable groups, while spearheading the human security perspective across sectors, also keeping in mind recent developments, such as the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the issuance of a political declaration on child soldiers. The issue of discrimination against Hansen’s disease patients has been discussed at the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, and Japan believes that this is an issue which the Human Rights Council should continue to address.

To conclude, Japan reiterates our resolve with cooperation of all parties present to fulfill a constructive role toward the vital attempt by the Human Rights Council to lay the global foundation for a new era in the promotion of human rights.

I thank you very much.

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