



HIGH-LEVEL
ROUNDTABLE

Unleashing the Power of Women

Expanding opportunities for women in the workplace and throughout society is a central plank in the Abe government's growth strategy for Japan. In that spirit, the Japanese government and three other sponsors convened the World Assembly for Women in Tokyo (WAW! Tokyo 2014) from September 12 to 14. Participating as speakers and as workgroup participants were about 100 public- and private-sector luminaries from around the world. Highlighting the event was a high-level roundtable on September 13.



SPONSORS: Government of Japan • Keidanren (Japan Business Federation) • Nikkei Inc. • Japan Institute of International Affairs
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Pictured above

Left, from top: Barbara Judge, Chairperson, UK Pension Protection Fund; Miki Tsusaka, Senior Partner and Managing Director, Boston Consulting Group; Zainab Hawa Bangura, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. Center, from top: Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan; Helen Clark, Administrator, United Nations Development Program. Right: Haruko Arimura, Minister in Charge of Women's Empowerment, Japan.



Unleashing the Power of Women

Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe opened WAW! Tokyo 2014's high-level roundtable on September 13 with a rousing welcome to the participants and guests. "To create a society in which women shine," declared the prime minister. "That is the pledge I made exactly a year ago at the United Nations General Assembly. This WAW! symposium is a step toward making that pledge a reality."

Also delivering remarks in the opening session were Helen Clark, the administrator of the United Nations Development Program; Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the executive director of UN Women;

Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, the speaker of the Bangladeshi parliament; Dédé Ahoéfa Ekoue, Togo's minister of social action, women promotion and literacy; and Vanda Guimar Pignato, El Salvador's secretary for social inclusion. In attendance were such dignitaries as Caroline Kennedy, the US ambassador to Japan, and Cherie Blair, a noted human rights advocate and the wife of former UK prime minister Tony Blair.

The opening session included a message from Liberian president and Nobel laureate Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. She and two other African women received the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of

their work in the nonviolent struggle for women's safety and rights. One of her corecipients, Yemen's Tawakkol Karman, was on hand for WAW! Tokyo 2014 as a workshop participant.

Prime Minister Abe reminded the attendees of Japan's wide-ranging support for women's empowerment worldwide. "Fundamental rights, such as the rights to education and health, must be ensured throughout the world. The world must come together as one and take action so that girls and boys can attend school equally and so that expectant mothers can receive medical care with peace of mind." Abe detailed the three-year, US\$3 billion commitment to women's-empowerment initiatives that he made at the United Nations General Assembly. And he reported that Japan is ahead of schedule in delivering the promised assistance.

The prime minister wrapped up the opening session with a call for the

participants to share their wisdom freely and frankly. "We have a proverb in Japan," Abe told his listeners, "that says 'Wisdom derives from the counsel of three people.' Today, not three but some one hundred people have come together. I hope that you will come forward with proposals for creating a society where women will shine."

Talk into action

After the opening session, the approximately 100 participants split up into two groups: one focused on measures for promoting an expanded role for women in economic activity and the other focused on global issues that affect women and on women's role in addressing those issues. Those two groups got started in tandem with 30-minute kickoff sessions.

The members then split up further into six workgroups focused on different themes: public- and private-sector

organizations, entrepreneurship, infrastructure, human security, peace and prosperity, and self-determination. The workgroups convened for 90 minutes in the morning and again for an hour after lunch to hammer out policy proposals.

Coordinating the group focused on women in the economy was Hiroko Ota, a professor at Japan's National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies and a former minister of state for economic and fiscal policy. She urged her members at their group kickoff session to identify ways to translate talk into action.

"We have heard repeated calls here for mobilizing women as a key to economic growth," Ota remarked. "Now, you will take up the question of measures for making that happen. I call on you to understand the issues that Japan faces and to generate policy proposals based on your experience in your different nations."

Coordinating the group focused on global issues that affect women was Akiko Yamanaka, a senior diplomatic

fellow at the Cambridge [University] Central Asia Forum and a former vice minister for foreign affairs. She called attention to the far-reaching implications of the proposals that the participants would prepare.

"Please enjoy substantive discussions in the small workshop format," encouraged Yamanaka in the expectation of heart-to-heart talks. "The secret weapon is us, women, who can help to ensure a more peaceful and stable world community."

As readily as any man

A pair of speakers offered remarks after the group coordinator at each of the kickoff sessions. All of the speakers emphasized the importance of sustainability in efforts for empowering women.

Haruko Arimura, the Abe government's minister in charge of women's empowerment, addressed the group focused on women in the economy. She called for female solidarity in support of empowering women.



"This WAW! symposium can be a game changer for gender equality and women's empowerment, connecting activists, leaders, and experts and setting the stage for a world in which women are free to participate fully and equally in all spheres of life."

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka
Executive Director, UN Women

"Reshaping institutions and practices to create a more amenable social framework for women will benefit all members of society," promised Arimura. "That means young and old, male and female, weak and strong. And this is about more than Japan. Women are a potential source of power for driving sustainable progress worldwide. So let us join together in voicing our needs and in calling for the requisite change."

Offering kickoff remarks to the same group was Grace Fu, Minister, Prime Minister's Office; Second Minister for the Environment and Water Resources; and Second Minister for Foreign Affairs of Singapore. She applauded Prime Minister Abe's expressed commitment to raising the percentage of Japanese leadership positions filled by women to 30% by 2020. Fu welcomed, too, Abe's emphasis on ensuring flexibility for women in living their lives—on not needing to face a stark choice between work and family. "I look forward," she concluded,



“to seeing the changes being made in Japan.”

Kicking off the group focused on global issues that affect women and on women’s role in addressing those issues were Japan’s minister for foreign affairs, Fumio Kishida, and Sierra Leone’s Zainab Hawa Bangura, the UN special representative on sexual violence in conflict. Both of them underlined the transcendent challenge of achieving and maintaining peace.

“Let us remind ourselves anew,” urged Kishida, “that the proactive participation

by women in society is part of the foundation for preventing conflict and for building peace. Women play a crucial role also in creating a society that is resilient to disaster.”

Bangura heightened the sense of urgency with a personal account of the aftermath of her nation’s civil war. “Countless women,” she related, “had been abducted and brutalized. I traveled from village to village, recording testimonies. Everywhere, I encountered women who were picking up the pieces of their shattered lives, building

networks of survivors, starting small businesses, even running for office in local elections.

“If we want women to participate in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, we must make it safe for them to do so. I hope our discussions today will bring us one step closer to a world where any woman can help decide the future of her country as readily as any man.”

To mandate or not to mandate

The debate and discussion in each of the workgroups were vigorous yet nuanced.

greeted the suggestion that Germany’s 80 million people presumably included a few dozen qualified women. Members of the workgroup mirthfully agreed that merit-based selection was less a factor than discrimination in the status quo.

Wary of quotas was Deborah M. Soon, a senior vice president at Catalyst Inc., a New York-based nonprofit research organization that monitors gender equality in business. Soon cited the US experience with ethnic quotas at universities. Numerous US universities, she noted, started with quotas for increasing

the percentage of non-Caucasian students and are now struggling to maintain a viable Caucasian percentage. She also noted that companies have a responsibility to appoint the best-qualified candidates to management positions, regardless of gender, and suggested that quotas could impede the fulfillment of that responsibility or cause other unintended consequences.

Zia Mody, the founder of and a senior partner at the Indian law firm AZB and Partners, acknowledged ambivalence about quotas. Her conclusion, however,



Japan’s first lady, Akie Abe, mingles with other WAW! Tokyo 2014 participants.

WORKGROUP RAPporteur
Public- and Private-Sector Organizations



Ellana Lee
Senior Vice President and
Managing Editor
CNN International

“I’m in total agreement with those of you who have pointed out the importance of role models. Media has a huge role to play, of course, and I hope that we’ll have representatives of Japanese mass media here next year in the workgroups, for we need to talk about ways of developing content to foster positive images of women.”

WORKGROUP MODERATOR
Entrepreneurship



Makiko Fukui
Founder and President
Harmony Residence, Inc.

“Attitudes about women’s business acumen are changing visibly in Japan. I run a recruitment service for women where we place management-level individuals and where we find rewarding work for single mothers. Our business is growing as employers awaken to the value that women can bring to the workplace.”

WORKGROUP MODERATOR
Infrastructure



Kathy Matsui
Managing Director
Goldman Sachs Japan Co., Ltd.

“Japan can ill afford to underutilize half of its human resources as it grapples with a shrinking and aging population, with labor shortages, and with fiscal challenges. Closing Japan’s gender gap in employment could increase the GDP by nearly 13%. So the potential benefits of womenomics are huge.”

WORKGROUP RAPporteur
Human Security



Catherine Russell
US Ambassador-at-Large for
Global Women’s Issues

“Something we need to address further is the role of gender-specific measures in emergency-response efforts. We must ensure that comprehensive and proven policies and mechanisms are in place to address and respond to the immediate needs of women and girls in the event of shocks or crises that threaten human security.”



A rich diversity of ethnic backgrounds and vocational experience enlivened the interchange in each of the workgroups.

Typical was the following exchange in the workgroup that handled the subject of expanding the role of women in public- and private-sector organizations. Under discussion were the pros and cons of adopting quotas or other numerical targets for the female percentages of corporate executives and managers.

Voicing support for quotas was Elke Ferner, the parliamentary state secretary at Germany’s Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth. The topic of the small number of women on corporate boards in Germany had come up. And knowing smiles had

is that quotas are a necessary evil for the time being. She expressed agreement with Soon’s objections. But she insisted that the only way to start when presented with an uneven playing field is with measures for leveling the field.

Sounding a cautionary note in the debate was Kevin McCann, the chairman of the Australian investment banking and financial services group Macquarie Group Limited. McCann emphasized the need for giving consideration to national and regional differences in contemplating quotas or any measures for promoting gender equality. He cautioned against the “error of applying

any approach arbitrarily across different jurisdictions.”

Shinzo Maeda, a former chairman of the cosmetics maker Shiseido Co., Ltd., objected to quotas on the basis that they can occasion adverse side effects. Seconding his view was Yukako Uchinaga, the chairperson of J-Win, a nonprofit organization that promotes diversity in the workplace. Even well-intended quotas, she warned, can invite negative reactions and thus become counterproductive.

Kimie Iwata, the president of the Japan Institute of Workers’ Empowerment and Diversity Management, expressed

support for numerical targets. She opined, however, that the government should not set and impose targets but, rather, should require companies to establish and pursue their own targets and to disclose information about their progress. Ferner objected, retorting that voluntary quotas don’t work with people who don’t want to change.

Also arguing for mandatory gender quotas was Yoshiaki Fujimori, the president and CEO of the building and housing equipment company LIXIL Group Corporation. He noted the deeply entrenched obstacles to women in senior management and submitted



that Japan will not change without mandatory mechanisms.

Offering an alternative approach was Anne Sweeney, the cochair of Disney Media Networks and the president of the Disney/ABC Television Group. She stressed that building diversity needs to begin at the workplace level. And she described her company's success in that endeavor. That success resulted, she explained, from making diversity a performance criterion for the hiring team. Compensation for the people responsible for hiring depended partly, in other

words, on their success in shaping a diverse workforce. And that, reported Sweeney, produced results.

No, I can't. Yes, I can

Discussions in all six workgroups turned repeatedly to the need for asserting initiative in effecting change. Witness the following comment by a member of the self-determination workgroup.

"We tend to look to the government to take the lead [in bringing about change]," observed Yoriko Kawaguchi, a professor at Meiji University's Institute

for Global Affairs and a former minister for foreign affairs. "But [the challenge of empowering women] calls for us to take the initiative as individuals and as society."

If the kind of initiative urged by Kawaguchi is to materialize, it will be the product of a combination of frustration and hope. Both elements are evident in comments by Masako Mori, a member of the House of Councillors and a former minister in charge of support for women's empowerment and child-rearing.

WORKGROUP RAPporteur
Peace and Prosperity



Melanne Vermeer
Executive Director
Georgetown [University]
Institute for Women, Peace
and Security

"We've seen here that a disconnect occurs between the peacebuilding contribution by women on the ground in war-torn areas and the lack of support for them from the governments trying to broker peace. Enlisting women's participation in the peacebuilding process is a struggle. It depends on active government support."

"I'll never forget the looks I got from people at New York University 15 years ago when they heard that I was from Japan. 'Oh, you poor thing,' they'd say. 'How do you cope with the male chauvinism there?' Well, 20 years have passed since I became a registered lawyer in Japan, and we women are still beating our heads against the glass ceiling."

Mori spoke proudly of the unprecedented tenaciousness of the Abe government in tackling the cause of empowering women. "This is our last, best chance to break through the glass ceiling. If we don't produce results this time around, the world will give up on us."

Positive results will hinge, believes Kawaguchi, on a shift in psychology. "I've had the experience [in government and in the private sector]," she recalled, "of trying to promote highly qualified younger women and having them refuse, saying 'No, I can't.' Each time, I suspected that a male of the same or lesser capabilities would have accepted, saying 'Yes, I can.'"

Kawaguchi acknowledged that the problem might be partly a Japan-specific issue. But she speculated that the female reticence to assume increased authority and responsibility is part of a broader pattern of social conditioning.

WORKGROUP RAPporteur
Self-Determination



Sheila Smith
Senior Fellow
Council on Foreign Relations

"What has emerged throughout our discussions is that for all our progress in women's empowerment we still face structural impediments. What is striking is the commonality of the problems in industrialized societies, which have legal protections, and less-industrialized societies, which lack protections."

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his wife, Akie Abe (seated on the prime minister's left), sit in on a WAW! Tokyo 2014 workgroup session. The prime minister and first lady visited all six workgroups.



Blueprints for change

Everyone reassembled for the closing session and the presentation of the workgroups' policy proposals. Ota and Yamanaka, the group coordinators, summarized the proposals as follows.

Public- and private-sector organizations

- Secure top management's commitment Clarify targets, implement action plans, and strengthen accountability. Endorse pending Japanese legislation that would support women's empowerment in the workplace. Promote change in middle management's mindset. Train women and produce female role models.

- Transform work formats

Abandon long working hours and adopt productive and flexible work practices. Shift from "work-life balance" to "work-life management" so individuals can decide freely how to blend work and life.

Entrepreneurship

- Encourage female entrepreneurship Lower hurdles in fund-raising through such means as providing loan financing without requiring personal guarantees. Familiarize young people with entrepreneurship as a viable career option.

- Support woman-run businesses Favor woman-run companies in allocating public-sector purchasing.

Infrastructure

- Expand care-in-the-home options Promote babysitting and caregiving in homes. Establish national standards for babysitters and caregivers and build a market infrastructure to connect supply and demand.

- Revise the income tax code and the social security system

Identify and eliminate tax and benefit weightings for dependents that discourage women from working outside the home. Introduce income tax deductions and other measures to support child rearing. Provide companies with tax incentives to encourage men to take parental leave.

Human security

- Address women's and children's needs Upgrade disaster preparedness.

- Invest in empowering women

Bolster social resilience through strategic investment in education, medical care, food, energy, and other pertinent sectors.

Peace and prosperity

- Ensure female participation in political leadership

Implement United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which calls for addressing the special needs of women and girls during and after military conflicts in repatriation and resettlement, rehabilitation, reintegration, and reconstruction. Secure the participation of women in all stages of peacebuilding and in pertinent governmental decision making.

- Reinforce the role of women in peace and security

Document the role that women play in peace and security and make the documentary evidence accessible to the public. Abolish the culture of impunity for sexual violence and provide survivor-centered support in peacebuilding.

Self-determination

- Reveal and correct biases against women in law, in institutions, and in national policy

Use advanced statistical analytics to analyze and monitor structural impediments to gender equality and to thereby keep a spotlight on challenges that women face in the workplace and throughout society.

- Empower women

Deploy technology in upgrading education, in providing enterprise support for small businesses, and in sharing information globally about best practice. Nurture self-confidence among women through high-visibility female activity in leadership positions.

The day the mountains move

Foreign minister Kishida thanked the participants for their proposals and reiterated the spirit he had expressed in his opening remarks: "Empower women, and you empower children and men and communities. That is the positive chain reaction that women's empowerment can bring."

Addressing the gathering after the presentation of the policy proposals, UN Women's Mlambo-Ngcuka spoke for everyone when she exclaimed, "I'm exhausted, but I'm energized!" She then evoked the spirit of WAW! Tokyo 2014 with a moving recitation of a 1911 work by the Japanese poet Akiko Yosano:

*The day the mountains move has come.
I speak, but no one believes me.
For a time the mountains have been asleep,
But long ago they all danced with fire.
It doesn't matter if you believe this,
My friends, as long as you believe:
All the sleeping women
Are now awake and moving.*



At the closing session (from left), roundtable group leaders Ota and Yamanaka, Japanese foreign minister Kishida, UN Women's Mlambo-Ngcuka, Bangladeshi parliament speaker Chaudhury, and the Macquarie Group's McCann.

"The situation of women differs from country to country. However, you who have gathered here today all share the wish of wanting to make the future brighter for women. I want this forum to be a starting point from which we share our wisdom and discover solutions."

Shinzo Abe
Prime Minister of Japan



"We have great news today," declared Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in his opening address to WAW! Tokyo 2014's high-level roundtable. The auspicious news was that UN Women will open a Tokyo office in 2015. Support for UN Women has been an important avenue for fulfilling the Abe government's commitment to female empowerment and to multilateral international cooperation. And Japan has increased its financial contributions to UN Women fivefold in the past year.

The United Nations established UN Women in 2010 to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women. Operational since 2011, UN Women has integrated and strengthened functions formerly handled by multiple UN agencies.

WAW! Tokyo 2014's Nationwide Glow

The WAW! Tokyo 2014 sponsors designated the period from September 8 to 19 as Shine Weeks, which occasioned scores of WAW!-related activities nationwide. One notable event was a symposium held in the city of Kyoto (photos).



The governor of Kyoto Prefecture, Keiji Yamada, and the head of the Kyoto Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Yoshio Tateishi, welcomed two WAW! Tokyo 2014 delegates from abroad: the Indian attorney Zia Mody (*left*) and Noni Purnomo, the president of the Indonesian transport enterprise Blue Bird Group Holding (*below*). Also on hand to welcome the guests were female representatives of academia and the cultural sphere.

Mody discussed obstacles that women face in Indian society and described her government's initiatives for overcoming those obstacles. Purnomo related her experience as a female CEO in a male-dominated industry and expressed admiration for the Abe government's commitment to empowering women.



Tateishi outlined the Kyoto Chamber of Commerce and Industry's goals for increasing the percentage of women in corporate management.

He noted that entrepreneurial creativity will be more important than ever to corporate viability in Japan as the population shrinks and ages. And he emphasized that women will be a wellspring of the needed creativity.



Kyoto Prefecture governor Yamada reflected on the central role of women in the literature and other facets of culture for which Kyoto is known. He pledged in his closing remarks a stepped-up commitment to female empowerment by the prefectural government in cooperation with related organizations.

GOVERNMENT OF JAPAN