



Left: Prime Minister Shinzo Abe with participants at the reception of the Second WAW!, held in 2015. Below: The panel discussion, where a wide range of topics are covered (Fourth WAW!, 2017).



FEATURE >>> Empowering Women, Enhancing Society

Redoubling Efforts for Women's Empowerment

Organized by the Japanese government as a forum for discussing initiatives for women's empowerment, the World Assembly for Women will hold its fifth meeting simultaneously with the Women 20 Assembly. Both events are expected to bring further depth to the discussion.

The World Assembly for Women (WAW!) is a Japanese-government-organized international symposium that aims to create a "society where women shine," one of Japan's most important agendas. Held in Tokyo since 2014, WAW! welcomes female leaders from all over the world who are excelling in their respective diverse fields. They assemble to

discuss women's empowerment, both in Japan and in the world, and make recommendations to promote wider participation by women in society.

Ayako Ohta, the leader and founder of "Sales Department Girls Section," cooperated with WAW! to establish her association in 2015 to provide career advice to its members. Since 2016, she has served as an advisor to WAW!



In October 2018, the W20 Argentina Summit was held in Buenos Aires. As one of the heads of delegation, Professor Emeritus Yoriko Meguro participated in the presentation of the W20 2018 Communique to the President of Argentina.

Yoriko Meguro, professor emeritus at Sophia University, will co-chair W20 Japan. A prominent influencer in gender studies in Japan, she has served as the representative of Japan to the UN Commission on the Status of Women.



According to Ayako Ohta, who provides career support for women working in sales, and has served as an advisor to WAW! since 2016, "The great thing about WAW! is that not only does it create personal networks while expanding one's outlook, it has also been enabling participants, from ordinary citizens in a regional area to leaders of organizations, to overcome gender and role preconceptions and gain a strong sense of ownership that can lead to subsequent action." WAW! is making a real impact, with one inspired participant launching a female-only human resources development business in a regional city in Japan. In 2017, when putting together the "WAW! 2017 Tokyo Declaration," advice was sought from all areas of society in order to come up with action guidelines that could truly change attitudes and strengthen partnerships.

The Fifth WAW!, which is to be

held in Tokyo from March 23 to 24, 2019, will be staged simultaneously to Women 20 (W20), an engagement group of the G20 that recommends policies to promote women's empowerment and gender equality. When held last year in Argentina, the G20 Leaders' Declaration stated gender equality as crucial for economic growth.

Taking the W20 chair this year, Japan's major focus is establishing governance to act on the G20's commitment. While W20 is more focused on women in the economy, discussions at WAW! will be more extensive, covering various other subjects. With the events held simultaneously, tremendous synergy ought to result.

"An ever-increasing number of young women today are pursuing their careers with confidence, unhindered by gender stereotypes. Their self-images are definitely changing," says Yoriko Meguro, co-

chair of the W20 Japan 2019 steering committee. "The moon is beautiful, but it cannot shine on its own. The sun, on the other hand, shines by itself. I take 'a society where all women shine' to mean, a society where all women can make their own decisions on their own lives," she asserts.

Attending this year will be Pakistani women's rights activist, Nobel Peace Prize winner and advocate for girls' education, Malala Yousafzai. As WAW! carries on encouraging more and more women and supporting their new endeavors, it is expected to contribute to the achievements of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and facilitate progress toward economic growth in which no one will be left behind. *