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Statement submitted by YWCA of Japan, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The YWCA of Japan, founded in 1905 and affiliated to the World Young Women's Christian Association since 1906, was granted special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 2019. We are honored and delighted to once again present our statement to the United Nations this year.

Following the Asian-Pacific War, the YWCA of Japan has engaged in a profound process of learning and collaboration with YWCA members in East Asian countries. These exchanges have enabled us to gain valuable insights from their experiences and shared pain, driving us to take responsibility as an organization and as individuals for Japan's war crimes, including its colonial rule in East Asian nations and the forced sexual enslavement of women from that region by the Japanese military. Simultaneously, we tirelessly work towards creating a just society where gender equity prevails, advocating for women's active participation in society, and striving for a peaceful world where human rights, health, and the environment are protected. To achieve these goals, we are dedicated to empowering marginalized populations through various initiatives. We firmly believe that all individuals, particularly women, should be guaranteed the opportunity to exercise their civil rights fully, with a special emphasis on valuing and amplifying the voices of young women.

At the Commission on the Status of Women 63, the youth delegates from the YWCA of Japan returned empowered and immediately launched a program in collaboration with local YWCAs in Japan. Their focus on "sexual consent" aimed to provide "comprehensive sexuality education" to teenage girls, particularly middle and high school YWCA members in Japan. Their determination was particularly strong because they did not receive comprehensive sexuality education during their own junior high and high school years. These dedicated young women have meticulously prepared and conducted workshops, developing the content themselves. During the workshop, the youths have consistently raised concerns about the inadequacy of the criminal code pertaining to sex crimes. Their unwavering commitment, coupled with the empowerment gained from the Commission on the Status of Women and the support of YWCAs throughout Japan, in response to the work of the World YWCA's young women's leadership development project "RISE UP!" has not only inspired other youth but has also sparked broader interest and engagement in topics such as gender, peace, and human rights.

In Japan, however, discussing matters related to sex remains a significant societal taboo. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology continues to avoid "directly teaching sexual intercourse" in compulsory education at schools. The COVID-19 pandemic brought forth alarming cases of online sexual exploitation of children, including child pornography. The youth delegates from the YWCA of Japan addressed this issue at the Commission on the Status of Women 67, emphasizing the importance of including sex education and IT literacy education as part of human rights education and outlining how to implement it. Despite the brave efforts of these youths to draw attention to the shortcomings in human rights and sex education in Japan, violations of human rights persist.

The economic landscape in Japan has further deteriorated due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and wavering political decisions. Numerous challenges loom large on the horizon, including inadequate evaluation systems within corporate organizations, a dearth of sufficient pregnancy and childcare leave options, the formidable barriers faced by single-parent women when seeking employment, and the financial hardships encountered when embarking on entrepreneurial ventures. There is a growing population of girls in need of social care, partly due to the persisting patriarchy and an inability to transform a society and culture that tolerates violence.

Economic deprivation, in some cases, exacerbates the situation, as individuals who receive social support and utilize care facilities often have to forgo pursuing higher education, trapping them in a cycle of poverty. Two local YWCAs in Japan operate care facilities for young women and girls who require social care, many of whom have suffered physical, psychological, sexual, and economic abuse within their families. We strongly advocate for comprehensive empowerment measures for these vulnerable individuals.

Given these circumstances, we, the YWCA of Japan, call for the following actions:

Actions Urging the United Nations

- Establish a framework for listening to the voices of youth, especially young women and girls, and ensure their perspectives are incorporated into all decision-making processes. Additionally, create mechanisms for gathering the views of economically disadvantaged youth who cannot travel to the UN headquarters. For this reason, we request a review of the decision to host the Commission on the Status of Women in New York, one of the world's most expensive cities.
- Lobby for the appropriate provision of care, empowerment, and education for young women and girls, particularly those in need of social care.

Actions Urging Governments

- Implement comprehensive sexuality education in line with UNESCO's "International technical guidance on sexuality education: an evidence-informed approach [Revised Version]," both in Japan and globally.
- Advocate for subsidies to cover travel and accommodation expenses for government youth representatives.
- Strengthen institutions, including legislation, and improve access to medical and counseling facilities to safeguard the sexual and reproductive health and rights of all individuals.
- Redirect national budgets away from military and defense spending, and allocate resources towards gender-based education and poverty alleviation.

We sincerely appreciate the opportunity to submit this statement and eagerly anticipate working alongside the non-governmental organization community, the Commission on the Status of Women, and the United Nations Economic and Social Council to advance these critical issues.
