

Opening speech by Mr. Tadamori Oshima, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Japan

“Welcome to Japan” to all the participants of the IPU Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians in Tokyo and Mr. Chowdhury, President of the IPU. I am Tadamori Oshima, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Japan. Thank you very much for coming.

The IPU, which was established in 1889 and has a long history, has taken on various issues that confronted the world in the different eras of the IPU’s history phrases. Our predecessors who gathered at the IPU discussed the many tasks that the world faced, came up with solutions, and worked to make the world a better place. Their determination has been passed on to us right up to this day. I believe that the reason that the IPU has managed to exist for such a long time is because its activities have gone beyond the framework of nations or regions, and it has followed the principle of equally allowing anyone, regardless of their race or religion, to speak and have their opinions heard.

Japan became a member of the IPU in 1908 and since then has played a part in its activities; we hosted the IPU Assemblies in Tokyo in 1960 and 1974 and also meetings for the ASEAN + 3 and Asia-Pacific groups. Mr. Shunichi Suzuki, who is here today and is a member of the House of Representatives, is currently serving as an executive committee member of the IPU, and is dedicated to the further development of the IPU. Looking at the world today, it is obvious that the role carried out by the IPU, where parliamentarians from various countries gather, is becoming more and more important, and Japan is determined to expand its contributions to IPU activities.

The IPU Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians is an opportunity for young parliamentarians from all over the world to come together in one place, exchange views about various issues faced by young people and young parliamentarians, and contribute to democracy and world peace and prosperity through discussions. I think that it has major significance not only for the countries and regions of the participants, but also for democracy throughout the world and for the future of all people. The fact that the number of participants at this Tokyo conference has exceeded our expectations indicates the high level of political awareness among the young parliamentarians, and I think that this is truly an honor for the Japanese Diet as the host.

I heard that at the Conference of Young Parliamentarians that was held by the IPU in October last year, under the theme of "Taking Democracy to Task," opinions were exchanged about young people and democracy, the political participation of young people, and the roles that young parliamentarians should play, and impassioned discussions were held.

This time the conference is being jointly held by the IPU and the Japanese Diet, with the theme of "Democracy, Peace, and Prosperity," and over the course of two days discussions will be held from various angles concerning the political, social, and economic problems that young people currently face. We have also arranged a Kyoto excursion after the conference. Many people will participate in the trip, and I hope that it will provide you with an opportunity to experience Japanese history, get to know each other better and enjoy each other's company. As the host, it will be our greatest pleasure if you take home the results of this conference as "seeds" and then have them bloom as "flowers" in your own countries and parliaments.

This year marks seventy years since the end of World War II. That seventy-year period is also the history of the development of Japanese democracy and parliamentary politics. For the House of Representatives general election that was held for the first time under the universal suffrage system in April 1946, the voting rate was 72.8 percent. The voting rate for the House of Representatives general election in December last year was 52.66 percent. Unfortunately, it seems that Japanese people's interest in politics has been gradually decreasing over this seventy-year period.

However, I have hope for the future. I think that democracy and the parliamentary system are some of the best ideas and systems that humans have invented. If people have an interest in democracy, surely democracy will make further advances and parliamentary activities will become more dynamic and productive.

Currently, due to advances in IT, people can connect with each other more easily than before. It is also possible to disseminate one's own opinion to the world and to learn the thoughts of people throughout the world. I think that the future of democracy will be bright if the young people all over the world do not rely only on technological advances, but also understand the value and spirit of democracy and learn to respect these things.

I believe that all of you are active as young parliamentarians in your own countries. Since there are as many parliaments as there are countries, the activities of parliaments are infinite in variety, and I think that although there are parliaments in which young parliamentarians

can freely operate, there are also parliaments in which young people are hindered by seniority-based systems and cannot conduct the activities they want to while they are young.

I was born in 1946, a year after World War II ended; I was first elected to the House of Representatives in 1983 at the age of 37. After spending time as a young parliamentarian just like you are, it is now 32 years since I became a Diet Member. During this period, I have, as a politician, strived hard to tackle various issues as they arose, but of course I have experienced both success and setbacks.

Young parliamentarians, many possibilities and equally many difficulties lie ahead of you. At the same time, behind all of you are the citizens of your countries. They are supporting you, rooting for you, and encouraging you. Public support is an equally important asset to both veteran parliamentarians with many years of experience and recently-elected young parliamentarians. I hope that you will work hard while keeping your citizens in mind.

In closing, I hope that this two-day conference will be very productive, that it will create many encounters and interactions, and that you will all have a pleasant stay in Japan.

Thank you.