

Speech at the 10th Asia-Pacific Cooperative Ministers' Conference

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● Introduction

Your Excellency Mr. Nguyen Chi Dzong, Minister of Planning and Investment of Vietnam;

Mr. Vo Kim Cu, President of Vietnam Cooperative Alliance; and

Mr. Balasubramanian G. Iyer, Regional Director of ICA Asia-Pacific;

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for inviting me to the 10th Asia-Pacific Cooperative Ministers' Conference.

Ladies and gentlemen, and Mr. Chairman,

On behalf of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japanese government, I would like to speak about Consumer's Cooperatives in Japan, focusing on their current state and their programs for elderly people.

1. Current state of Consumer's Cooperatives in Japan

In Japan, the Consumer's Cooperative system was established based on the Consumer Cooperatives Act in 1948, with aims to stabilize members' lives and to enhance culture in daily living.

Today, there are about 1,000 cooperatives and a total of 64 million members. Cooperatives engage in various businesses as mutual help, including supply of daily commodities, mutual-aid insurance, healthcare, and welfare services. As active players in our economy, they make a significant contribution to consumers' lives.

2. Elder care by Consumer's Cooperatives

In Japan, as community ties become weaker along with the rapid population aging and declining birthrate, we are facing many challenges, such as increasing healthcare and welfare services as well as

rebuilding community-based mutual assistance. In order to promote active involvement in healthcare and welfare activities among community-based consumer cooperatives, the Consumer Cooperatives Act was amended in 2007. The amended law specifies healthcare and welfare businesses in the text, and it has loosened the regulations regarding cooperatives' provision of healthcare and welfare services to non-members in their communities.

Thanks to this amended law, we have seen the growth in welfare businesses and community-based mutual support activities by cooperatives. Today, 181 cooperatives engage in elderly care services. Also, 483 cooperatives organize a variety of mutual support activities in their communities. In the area of elderly welfare, their services include housework assistance, gathering places, care prevention, and mobility assistance.

Moreover, the cooperatives that supply daily commodities have also signed agreements with 52.3% of local municipalities across the country to watch elderly people on a daily basis while delivering goods. They also provide delivery services for vulnerable people on 152 remote islands across the country who have difficulty in shopping.

3. Future Vision

In Japan, The rebuilding of community-based mutual assistance is becoming a challenge. Therefore, we strive to nurture human ties once again in a local community, the foundation of people's lives. The goal is to realize 'regional cohesive societies' that is a generous society, where all the people can respect and embrace diversity.

At Consumer's Cooperatives, local residents organize themselves in order to resolve challenges in their communities; they make a financial contribution to form a cooperative and operate their own businesses that are necessary to resolve challenges. We can call these organizations the pioneers of 'regional cohesive societies'.

Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare also expects Consumer's Cooperatives to play a role as the essential bodies in Japanese local communities. We would like them to collaborate with local public entities and

to actively contribute to creation of 'regional cohesive societies'. That is why We are determined to work with and support consumer cooperatives for their healthy development.

Lastly, the "idea and practice of organizing shared interests in cooperatives" was added to UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage last year. This is the recognition that cooperatives have contributed to development of local communities, not just members' lives, through their businesses and activities.

I hope the value of various cooperatives and the roles they play in the modern society will continue to be recognized widely, and I wish you the best for the further development of cooperatives.

Thank you very much.