

2020 Virtual UN Forum on Business and Human Rights
High-Level Plenary
(November 16, 2020)
Statement by State Minister for Foreign Affairs UTO Takashi

Madam Chair,

Distinguished Panelists,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great honor to have this opportunity to be part of the 9th UN Forum on Business and Human Rights.

First, we greatly appreciate the support the UN Working Group and the OHCHR have extended in organizing this Forum amidst the unprecedented COVID-19 crisis that the international community is currently facing.

Japan promotes various efforts to achieve the SDGs and tackle global issues based on the principle of human security. In this regard, we also value the promotion and protection of human rights by proactively working on these issues.

With advances in the globalization of business activities, the business and human rights agenda is becoming increasingly important. Against this backdrop, this October, Japan launched the first-ever National Action Plan (NAP) on Business and Human Rights to steadily implement the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs). This NAP clarifies relevant policies across the ministries and agencies from the perspective of business and human rights. It also sets out expectations for business enterprises to promote introducing human rights due diligence in the context of their business activities.

COVID-19 is shaking our economy and society. It is also particularly impacting the most vulnerable segments of society. On top of this, COVID-19 is revealing the vulnerabilities concerning labor conditions in supply chains. Under such circumstances, we believe that it is more important than ever to implement the UNGPs and have the NAP for the UNGPs' implementation.

Today, I would like to share the lessons that we have learned through the NAP formulation process.

First of all, considering how the business and human rights agenda covers a vast range of areas, the inter-ministerial approach is vital when formulating a NAP. For our part, we established an Inter-Ministerial Committee composed of 15 relevant agencies and ministries. The inter-ministerial discussions

helped with sharing information among agencies. Also, these discussions deepened the understanding of the importance of efforts concerning business and human rights. This will serve as a basis for implementing the NAP steadily and subsequently ensuring policy coherence on business and human rights.

Second, when formulating a NAP we consider it indispensable to ensure a process that enables us to gain a wide range of inputs, including through participation of various stakeholders and public comments procedures. During the process, we organized a series of consultations with multi-stakeholders such as: the business sector, including SMEs; the financial sector; the labor sector; consumer organizations; bar associations; academia; and civil society. We also invited the public for comments twice during the formulation process to express various views on it. Moreover, we had opportunities to obtain views from international experts, including Ms. Ramasastry, Chairperson of the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights. By going through this process, we have come to realize that this process itself has greatly helped stakeholders from various fields, to enhance the understanding of the business and human rights agenda. Going forward, we will work on implementing the NAP by continuing dialogue with a wide range of stakeholders. By raising awareness of this NAP, we hope that more of the engaged business enterprises will recognize the value of efforts in the area of business and human rights. We hope these business enterprises

will see such efforts as something that contributes to enhancing corporate values, as opposed to merely generating additional expenditure.

Chair and panelists,

The year 2021 will mark the 10th anniversary of the endorsement of the UNGPs at the UN Human Rights Council. From our end, through the steady implementation of our NAP, we will endeavor to achieve the following objectives: the UNGPs will be implemented; responsible business conduct will be promoted; and the human rights of those who could be affected by business activities will be protected and promoted.

Finally, I would like to conclude my statement by sharing our expectation that we will witness accelerating efforts regarding business and human rights in many countries, commencing with the launch of NAPs.

Thank you for your kind attention.

(End)