Statement by Ms. Yaeko Sumi
Alternate Representative of Japan
on item 27: Social Development
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Mr. Chairman,

I would like to express my heartfelt congratulations to you on your assumption as chair of this committee. Let me assure you of my delegation’s utmost support to your efforts and leadership.

Mr. Chairman,

Poverty, inequality, unemployment and underemployment, and political uncertainty are all barriers to achieving the empowerment of people around the world. Such empowerment is essential for achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full and productive employment and decent work for all. In this regard, Japan is determined to further spread and put into actual practice the concept of human security, which proposes to protect and empower individuals and thereby build a better society.
Mr. Chairman,

We welcome that the global proportion of persons living in extreme poverty has been reduced by half over the last 20 years through the efforts of the international community toward Goal 1 of the Millennium Development Goals: poverty eradication. On the other hand, the UN estimates that there will still be one billion people living in extreme poverty by 2015. We support the idea that the post-2015 development agenda should continue to focus on real and meaningful poverty eradication in the context of sustainable development and should be guided by human security.

African countries in particular still continue to face challenges such as poverty, inequality and youth unemployment. In order to address these challenges, Japan has been developing a close partnership with Africa over the years. Just this summer, Japan co-hosted the Fifth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD V) together with the African Union Commission, the United Nations, the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme in the city of Yokohama, Japan. Participants of the conference adopted the Yokohama Declaration 2013, which contained the overarching principles of ‘supporting Africa’s own efforts,’ ‘mainstreaming women,’ ‘increasing opportunities for youth’ and ‘promoting human security’, as well as the Yokohama Action Plan 2013-2017, which enumerates specific measures to be taken based on the Declaration over the next five years. We will implement the commitments, which have an emphasis on self-help, self-reliance and growth.

Mr. Chairman,

The continued efforts of the international community to promote the rights, welfare and empowerment of vulnerable groups are surely needed.

The High-level Meeting on Disability and Development, held on 23 September, unquestionably enhanced the momentum toward the protection of
the human rights of persons with disabilities as well as their empowerment in the context of development. Japan will implement the outcome document for disability-inclusive development adopted at the meeting. Since Japan signed in 2007 the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, a landmark agreement to promote and protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of persons with disabilities, we have amended our Basic Law for Persons with Disabilities and our Act for the Promotion of Employment of Persons with Disabilities. We have also recently formulated the Act on the Elimination of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities in response to calls from civil society. Now, with the passage of these national laws, Japan hopes to continue its efforts to conclude the Convention as soon as possible.

We also support the empowerment of youth, which is one of the Secretary-General’s five-year action agenda, and in this regard we appreciate the vigorous activities of Mr. Ahmad Alhendawi, the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth. Japan in cooperation with Brazil took the initiative to introduce the resolution “Integrating volunteering in the next decade” (A/RES/67/138), which was adopted by the General Assembly last year. Already, Japan has been acting concertedly for the promotion of youth volunteerism. The Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) was launched by Japan about half a century ago, and since then approximately 38,000 volunteers have been sent to 88 countries throughout the world. Through this programme, youth volunteers have contributed to peace and development around the globe.

I would also like to introduce a programme for Japanese university student volunteers, originally started by UNV and Kwansei Gakuin University in 2004, which deploys youth volunteers around the world for five- to six-month terms. This programme has since expanded to five universities throughout Japan. For the 2013 project phase, twelve youths from Japanese universities have been sent to volunteer in twelve countries including Cambodia, Timor-Leste, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Samoa, Fiji, Kenya and
Rwanda. We will continue to promote further volunteering in cooperation with UNV and the member states.

During the second review of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, some progress on policies and actions in a number of countries was reported. On the other hand, it was also reported that challenges to the full implementation of the Action Plan still remain and that older persons, especially in developing countries, are confronted with significant difficulties such as poverty, age-based discrimination, violence, abuse, unemployment and lack of health services. In view of this review, it is necessary to identify the gaps between existing frameworks and the actual challenges faced by older persons. We should also fully implement the existing frameworks, including extant human rights treaties, special procedure mandate-holders, the UPR and the UN Funds and Programmes.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation looks forward to having a fruitful discussion on how we may ensure the empowerment of all people as an approach to achieving all three core themes of social development.

Thank you.