

## Can Anyone See Any "Shining Women"? --- Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's Policies toward Women

### Courtesy call on Mr. Abe by Executive Director of UN Women

In late March 2014, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the Executive Director of UN Women (Note 1), came to Japan and met with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. She emphasized that one of the Abe Administration's main goals has been the empowerment of women in the workforce, intended to create Japan as a society in which women can "shine." Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka noted that "Prime Minister Abe's strong attention toward women's policy has helped to raise the profile of UN Women," and mentioned also that she applauded his efforts to promote women's participation in a speech given before the United Nations General Assembly. However, she also pointed out that Japanese women's participation in society remains very low.

### To whom did Mr. Abe make international policy pledges?

Since taking office in September 2012, Prime Minister Abe has mentioned the importance of creating "a society where women shine" in numerous international policy speeches. In September 2013, for example, he stated at the New York Stock Exchange that his government would make childcare arrangements for 200,000 Japanese children within two years and provide arrangements for another 200,000 children over a five-period in order to promote women in the workforce. The number of children on the waiting list for childcare

nationwide, however, is still 850,000. In the same period, Mr. Abe said at the 68th Session of the UN General Assembly that "Creating an environment in which women find it comfortable to work, enhancing opportunities for women to work and to be active in society is a matter of the greatest urgency."

On May 6th Mr. Abe also mentioned in a keynote speech at the Ministerial Council Meeting of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) that Japan had set a target of having women occupy 30% of leadership positions within society by 2020 and would move forward in creating a labor structure that gives more consideration to work-life balance. Although we do not know whether it is coordinated with these statements by the prime minister or not, the Foreign Ministry also held an international symposium entitled "The World Assembly for Women in Tokyo" from September 12-13, 2014.

### Abe's policy measures toward women only aim to "promote Japan"

These pledges have garnered worldwide attention, as international society watches to see whether Prime Minister Abe will take proper action to implement these measures or not. Some argue that bringing effective pressure to realize these policies is voters' responsibility. Nevertheless, there is an enormous gap between Abe's policies toward women - which promote only a few, elite women - and the reality of ordinary working women and their

social consciousness.

While Prime Minister Abe emphasizes issues of work-life balance, following requests by corporate leaders, he is considering a system in which companies would not have to pay overtime salary at all. Under the implementation of such a system, even those few elite female professionals who devote themselves to developing their career would be forced to work equally with men without any chance to enjoy a work-life balance.

And yet, at the same time, the vast majority of women are struggling with the multiple burdens of unstable job status, low wages, and unpaid household work. Furthermore, the Abe Administration's "zero waiting list" policy for childcare does nothing other than increasing the number of non-regular nursery staff. Under such circumstances, where can you see any "shining women"?

The Abe Administration's package of women's policies only aims to take "urgent action to cope with Japan's fertility crisis," and to "use" women as a core force of its economic growth strategies. It does not demonstrate a recognition of and respect for women's human rights.

What kind of message should we take from these policy measures? The Abe

Administration has authorized the use of the right to collective self-defense and it has a clear leaning toward war. Inspired by a lesson given by Fusae Ichikawa (1893-1981), who joined the leadership of the Kokubou Fujinkai (National Defense Women's Association) in the Second World War because she believed that women's political participation might provide women with opportunities to be liberated from a feudalistic family system, we should raise our voices AGAINST Abe's policies toward women and keep firmly in mind that we cannot achieve equal rights without piece. The Abe Administration is only self-interestedly pursuing economic policies around women in order to achieve their national goals. We do not live our lives for Abe's purposes.

Kuniko Funabashi(AJWRC)

Translated by Akemi Marumo

1: UN Women, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, was established in 2010 to accelerate UN goals on gender equality and the empowerment of women. UN Women merges and builds on four United Nations organizations, including the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

## Doubts about the "All Women Can Shine" Policy in the Bill for the Promotion of the Activity of Women in the Workplace

The Abe Administration has proposed a policy of promoting women's participation in the public as key to its growth strategy since the prime minister returned to his present seat at the end of 2012.

On July 2014, the Cabinet announced its "Japan Revitalization Strategy (Revised in 2014)" which advocated the construction of a