Statement by Mr. ITANI Tetsuya, Director, Office of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan at round table 2 of agenda item 3b), the Seventh Asian and Pacific Population Conference on 16 November 2023

Thank you, moderator.

Excellency and ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning and good afternoon. I am ITANI Tetsuya, Director, Office of Global Health Cooperation, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan. I am honoured to attend this round table of the Seventh Asian and Pacific Population Conference today. First of all, I would like to appreciate UN ESCAP and UNFPA for organizing this conference. In terms of health and social welfare, declining birthrate and a growing population of elderly people is one of big challenges of Asian and Pacific regional countries. In this regard, I would like to make a brief statement on Japan’s situation and efforts on aging society.

(Increase in health life expectancy)
As it is generally known, Japan is a super-aging society. People aged 65 and over account for 29 % of the total population. That is the highest rate in the world. (The figure was the estimate of October 1, 2022.)

At the same time, Japan is known as a country which realized Universal Health Coverage and promoting UHC toward its realization around the world. In Japan’s history, Japan achieved universal health insurance coverage in 1961 and introduced a long-term care insurance system in 2000. Japan has also been facilitating health promotion initiatives that are appropriate for stages of life including prevention of non-communicable diseases, by involving communities and workplaces. Those initiatives are based on the second national health promotion campaign, called Health Japan 21.
As a result of such efforts, elderly people’s physical fitness and exercise capacity have consistently improved. In 2019, Japan formulated a Plan for the Extension of Healthy Life Expectancy with the aim of further extending healthy lifespans.

Under this plan, Japan sets a goal to increase healthy life expectancy by at least three years from the actual healthy life expectancy in 2016 by 2040 to at least 75.14 years for men and at least 77.79 years for women.

While Japan advances the efforts that it has made so far, Japan also promotes initiatives mainly in the following three areas, using new methods to encourage behavior changes, such as creating an environment that enables people to stay healthy naturally, leveraging behavioral science and introducing an incentive system:
1) Building lifestyle habits for all people including those in the next generation to be able to live healthy lives;
2) Disease prevention and preventing the aggravation of symptoms;

Over the past decade in Japan, healthy life expectancy has increased faster than the average life expectancy, and the physical fitness and exercise capacity of elderly people have improved to nearly the same level as those five years younger than them. Japan will continue to promote disease prevention and approaches to increasing and improving people’s health in order to create a society in which people are active throughout their lives.

(Community-based integrated care system)
In addition, Japan has been working to create a community-based integrated care system to provide housing assistance, medical and nursing care, preventive health care services
and living support systematically. The aim is to make sure that elderly people can continue to live their own lives in a familiar place until the end of their lives.

At the end of April 2022, there were 5,404 community general support centers nationwide, which serve as core institutions to achieve the community-based integrated care system. The centers offer cross-sectoral support while providing a wide range of consultation services for community residents including elderly people and their family members who need assistance or care services.

(Dementia supporter)
To prevent dementia, it is important to detect people suspected of having dementia earlier and to provide appropriate support to them. Therefore, communities and occupational organizations in Japan are working on training people so that they can acquire correct knowledge about dementia and help people with dementia and their families. Those trained people are called “dementia supporters”. At the end of March 2023, more than 14 million people were trained as dementia supporters nationwide, helping create a society friendly to elderly people with dementia.

(Closing)
To conclude, aging society is a common challenge in many countries in the region and around the world, and it is vital for those countries to work closely to make sure that more older adults can live fulfilling lives as they share applicable examples, evidence, experiences, and research outputs that are useful for healthy aging and the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases.

Thank you for your attention.