

The 3rd World Congress on Probation, September 13, 2017

Opening Remarks

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, I am Yoko Kamikawa, Minister of Justice of Japan.

I would like to first extend a very warm welcome to all overseas participants who have traveled to Japan from approximately 40 countries and jurisdictions.

Furthermore, I would like to take this opportunity to offer my sincere gratitude to all Japanese volunteers and practitioners for their continuous assistance and support for offender rehabilitation.

As most of you recall, the First World Congress on Probation was held in London, and the Second World Congress on Community Corrections was held in Los Angeles. I am greatly honored to host

this Third World Congress on Probation here in Tokyo, which is the very first congress to be held in Asia.

The main theme of this Congress is “Development of Probation and the Role of the Community” . Most people who have committed crimes or juvenile delinquency return to our communities in due course. Therefore, community-based treatment is essential to prevent re-offending and to promote reintegration into the community.

Japan’s history of community-based treatment of offenders dates back to the late nineteenth century, when a few philanthropists started offering rehabilitation services for discharged prisoners in Shizuoka Prefecture. Ever since, many citizens and organizations such as Volunteer Probation Officers, Offenders Rehabilitation Facilities, Cooperative Employers,

members of the Women's Associations for Rehabilitation Aid and the BBS Association have continually played crucial roles in the prevention of re-offending and the reintegration of offenders into the community. I believe their efforts have greatly contributed toward Japan's goal of becoming "the Safest Country in the World" .

In Japan, Volunteer Probation Officers are especially important to the realization of this goal. These citizen-volunteers are well acquainted with the situation and customs of their communities, and they engage in their work with the spirit of social service.

Approximately 48,000 Volunteer Probation Officers across the country are committed to assisting in the rehabilitation of as many as 73,000 probationers and parolees annually. They are assigned to any one of approximately 900

probation districts for Offenders Rehabilitation throughout the country.

In most cases, since probationers and their assigned Volunteer Probation Officers live in the same communities, they can make immediate contact with each other. Volunteer Probation Officers interact with offenders and juvenile delinquents as neighbors rather than as government officials. As fellow citizens and volunteers, they attentively listen to their concerns and wishes.

Volunteer Probation Officers give thoughtful consideration to the establishment of mutual trust, and offer guidance to probationers and parolees –at times nicely, at times strictly. This sincere guidance and support encourages many probationers and parolees to regain self-respect, re-enter the community and live their lives independently without reoffending. Furthermore, after the

expiration of probationary supervision, some Volunteer Probation Officers continue to serve as trusted counselors for the ex-probationers and ex-parolees who they used to supervise.

In addition, Volunteer Probation Officers organize Volunteer Probation Officer's Associations in each probation district. Volunteer Probation Officers, in cooperation with other members of the associations, also take on leadership roles for a variety of crime prevention and youth development activities in the community, including, holding meetings on drug abuse and juvenile delinquency with local residents.

Through such active community activities, Volunteer Probation Officers make every effort to create a brighter society free of crime and juvenile delinquency; furthermore, their efforts to engage local residents in crime prevention

activities help create an inclusive society. Volunteer Probation Officers are motivated by their warm concern for their neighbors and their desire to give back to the communities in which they live. Their valuable activities significantly contribute to maintaining safe and secure communities, and to the enhancement of community-based treatment of offenders.

At the same time, the government of Japan has assigned the task of tackling reoffending as one of its highest priorities in order to ensure the safety and security of its communities, placing special emphasis on the “rule of law” and “protection of human rights” .

Among a variety of government policy protocols, firstly, in July 2012, the policy entitled “Comprehensive Measures for the Prevention of Repeat Offenses” stipulates

efforts of the government for recidivism prevention. This strategy was the first to set a numerical target to “decrease the rate of inmates who become re-imprisoned within two years of release from prison by more than 20 percent by 2021” .

Secondly, in December 2014, the government approved the declaration entitled “No Return to Crime, No Facilitation of a Return to Crime – Toward a Bright Society with Everyone Supporting Rehabilitation” . The declaration emphasizes that it is essential to create a social environment where offenders can smoothly “re-enter” the community as responsible members of society. This declaration promotes the efforts of the country to secure jobs and housing for those who return to society from prisons. Lastly, in December 2016, “The Act Pertaining to Promotion of Recidivism

Prevention” was enacted.

With the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games approaching, the government, local authorities, and the private sector will work together to achieve Japan’s goal of becoming the safest country in the world. For example, through the development of a detailed roadmap, the government will continue to tackle reoffending in a well-planned and comprehensive manner

These efforts are founded on the principle that “No one will be left behind” , which is the essential idea of the “Sustainable Development Goals” adopted in 2015 by the United Nations. We believe that this World Congress will be a first step in the worldwide promotion of the principle that “No one will be left behind” throughout the field of community-based treatment of offenders.

During this World Congress, I look forward

to sharing with you Japan's experiences and accomplishments in the field of offender rehabilitation. We are very proud of the role the community has played in developing and promoting offender rehabilitation. I hope that each of you may find something useful in these experiences that you can take home and apply.

Also, by sharing the experiences of each country and embracing these experiences with an open mind, it is my great hope that this World Congress achieve its goal to promote and develop community-based treatment, and that it will broaden and strengthen global, professional and personal networks in this field.

Last but certainly not least, I wish you all a successful Congress and a wonderful time during your stay in Japan.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.