

2010 Global Summit of Women – Gala Award Dinner

21 May 2010, Beijing

2010 Global Women's Leadership Award

Sadako Ogata

President, Japan International Cooperation Agency

1. Acknowledgement

Great honor and privilege:

Congratulations to all here present at the 20th anniversary Global Summit of Women. You represent women leaders from wide range of regions and walks of life. You are here assembled to evaluate your achievements, but also to map out future courses of action. Looking over the global horizon, the challenges are great; there are still those who are struggling to survive, to gain their daily livelihood and to rise from poverty. They need our help and those of us here are the ones who can and are responsible to rise and respond to their needs.

I wish also to congratulate the women of China who are our hosts. You are the backbones of the marvelous social and economic progress that your country has achieved. You have worked hard, helped shape your national agendas and together with women from the Asia neighbors, Korea, India, Indonesian Philippines and others including Japan, have pushed Asia today to the forefront of economic cooperation and development.

2. Japan and my experience

In Japan, women are also making great strides. Let me review a bit

my personal history. Traditionally, women in Japan were the mainstay of society, but they were expected to center their action and commitment to those of the family. “Women’s place was at home and family.” While still strong commitments and expectations to be family centered, big changes have taken place in the last sixty years. Women have become well educated, women are in all professions, women are in politics, they are also the bread earners.

Let me introduce a bit my own experiences. I grew up in a liberal family, was encouraged to gain higher education and go abroad to study. My father expected me to be a professional woman, but yet, he said that “your vocation will be family and home, but your avocation can be to become a scholar.”

First half of my life --- academic: I researched and lectured. Specialized in history and political science. International relations was always my main interest.

I raised two children and kept a busy life: rushing through family chores and staying up late to prepare lectures.

Exposure to international activities started, as Japan began to open up opportunities for women.

3. International involvement

In 1968, I was appointed as a public member of the Japanese delegation to UN General Assembly.

Ichikawa Fusae, leading suffragette, parliamentarian who contributed greatly to women’s political participation and advancement, pushed the Foreign Ministry to include a woman delegate to UN General Assembly.

Through repeated participation in UN conferences, I served as Japan’s first representative to the UN Human Rights Commission and thereafter added involvement in various international activities.

The 1975 International Women’s Year brought big changes --- legal and social changes in Japan and all over the world.

In 1991, I was elected to become UN High Commissioner for Refugees and served from 1991 through end of 2000.

There were busy years as refugee numbers reached record heights, caused by the end of Cold War and new conflicts following decolonization.

Emergency humanitarian activities --- saving lives, legal protection: returning them home and starting new life.

Engaged in development: refugees returning home frequently to war devastated and poverty stricken countries.

4. From humanitarian to development activities, JICA 2003

In Japan, women increasingly became well educated and active.

No affirmative action as such was taken. Japan frequently lagged behind in international comparative surveys on the status of women.

In 1970's, Japan introduced equal payment law for women.

JICA holds competitive staff employment examination. Third to half are women today, although development assistance is not the easiest career choice due to service in overseas developing countries.

Competitive career path --- women now reaching senior management posts in many organizations including JICA.

5. Women's life cycle and career path

I am pleased with big strides attained by women. Women need jobs, but jobs need women. Every country requires full input from women to achieve economic growth, social stability and human happiness.

In this context, it is important to consider women's life cycle.

Child birth: child care: career path: care of senior citizens --- women play central roles.

Women must be given flexible working hours: work share between men and women: facilities and institutions such as hospitals and child care and senior citizens homes.

6. Appeal to women

I appeal to all here present, raise your voices and speak up, point out future needs and trends clearly and lead the world with wisdom and sympathy for all human beings.

Thank you for the honour and recognition you have given me. I share the honour with all colleagues --- men and women who have worked closely with me. I count all of you as my colleagues engaged in responding to global challenges ahead of us.