Peacebuilding through Promoting Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment - Challenges and Opportunities in Africa -

On August 26, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the United Kingdom Government represented by the Department for International Development (DfID), and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) co-organized a seminar as a side event of TICAD VI on the themes of the challenges and opportunities for promoting the protection and empowerment of women toward peace-building in Africa at the Hilton Nairobi Hotel. The event venue, with an audience of some 100, was filled with interested participants drawn from African governments, international organizations and civil society, and lively discussions were held between the floor and the speakers.

The event was opened by remarks by Mr Kitaoka, President of JICA, who introduced the background and the themes of the event. He emphasized that while it is gravely regrettable that women and girls often become targets of sexual violence during conflict, it is those same women who have the potential to promote conflict resolution and lay the foundation of nation-building in African countries. He emphasized that everyday women’s contribution to peacebuilding process as well as that of leaders should not be underestimated. At the end of his address, he stressed that it is crucial in Africa, where violent conflicts continue to destroy many peoples’ lives, to accelerate implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, "Women, Peace and Security" (WPS), and relevant resolutions, to which this side event is dedicated.

Following the opening remarks, two keynote speeches were delivered by Ms. Kobi Bentley, Deputy Head of DfID Somalia, and Ms. Angelique Sarr, Regional Advisor on Gender and Sexual Violence of the ICRC’s Regional Delegation in Dakar, Senegal. Using specific data and evidence, Ms. Bentley made a strong case of how women’s empowerment can contribute to conflict resolution and lasting peace in Africa and, drawing on her experiences in Somalia, she also spoke of the real challenges to promoting gender equality and empowerment on the ground. Ms. Sarr introduced a
legal background of ICRC’s approach to sexual violence against women and girls during armed conflicts and discussed some of the specific challenges encountered in the field, especially regarding prevention of sexual violence and access to emergency health care for victims of sexual violence.

The panel discussion included a gender expert from the African Union (AU), a local female government official from northern Uganda and a female entrepreneur from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and was moderated by Ms. Yumiko Tanaka, Senior Advisor on Gender and Development at JICA. They shared with the audience the difficulties faced by women during and after conflicts, and discussed how women can help sustain peace and what sort of changes is needed in Africa. That discussion was followed by an intervention from Ms. Makiko Kubota, Senior Advisor on Gender and Development at JICA, who provided her views on the issues of women’s participation and leadership based on the research result of some conflict-affected Asian countries. In a question-and-answer session that ensued, event participants engaged in direct dialogue with the speakers and panelists, discussing the way forward for African governments, civil society, and the international community toward accelerating implementation of the WPS. In particular, it was pointed out that the tendency of “hearing but not listening” and “hearing but not acting” are big operational challenges; hence women’s participation in all the decision-making processes of peacebuilding and capacitating their leadership were considered as a key to bring peace to Africa.

In line with the event discussions, JICA will continue to support African governments and communities toward making gender equality and women empowerment an integral part of all aspects of life from community development to decision making while respecting Africa’s specific efforts and initiatives.

**Opening Remarks**
- Kitaoka, Shinichi, President, JICA

**Keynote Speakers**
- Bentley, Kobi, Deputy Head, Somalia Office, Department for International Development (DfID), UK
- Sarr, Angelique Gabriel Tening, Regional Advisor on Gender and Sexual Violence, ICRC’s Regional Delegation in Dakar

**Panelists**
- Butera, Jean-Bosco, Chief of Staff, Office of Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, African Union Commission
- Martine, Unzia, Chief Administration Officer, Maracha District, Uganda
- Veringa-Gieskes, Patricia, President, National Social Commission of Business of the Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo
- Kubota, Makiko, Senior Advisor on Gender and Development, JICA
Moderator

- Tanaka, Yumiko, Senior Advisor on Gender and Development, JICA