

November 9, 2007

**The First Speech at the Diet by Mr. Eita Yashiro,
Member of the House of Councilors**

January 30, 1980

Mr. Eita Yashiro: I just now took a long way around in order to come up to this podium. I strongly requested to step up to the podium from the front, however, was not allowed to; it is because I am in a wheelchair, but that is not the only reason. It is also because of the structure of this Diet Building which was built in 1936. When they started to design this building in 1918, no one would have predicted that some day someone in a wheelchair would be coming up to the podium. It was perhaps inevitable at that time, yet it is certain that this building was constructed for people who are healthy and can walk freely as a standard. That is the very reason why I can not come up to the podium by myself.

Prime Minister, the Diet Building is not the only building created for people who are healthy and can walk as a standard. Public properties, other buildings, towns, and transportation systems are all the same. It may be better to say that the entire present Japanese society is created and operated on such a norm. What lies underneath is the implicit understanding that persons who can walk or who can see are normal. In other words it means that persons with disabilities, such as a person who cannot walk, who cannot see, who cannot hear, or who has slow development in intelligence, are atypical being and a minority, and therefore it is unavoidable to have them sacrificed to some extent for the sake of the majority of healthy and normal people who meet the standard. Actually, such understanding is often not even implicit, but explicit.

A main pillar of the welfare system in our nation has been to isolate. If people have physical disabilities or if people get old, they are put away in an institution as they are a burden on society. Since last year, it was made mandatory for children with disabilities to attend special schools for children with disabilities, and children with any disability are not permitted to study in regular schools because of their disabilities. I am not negating the existence of special schools for children with disabilities, but I would like to point out that some people even call such a hard-line attitude taken by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture a 'hunt of children with

disabilities' because of this stance that anyone with any disability must be sent only to special schools.

However, Prime Minister, you stated in your policy speech, as now we are entering the 1980s, a major shift of our conception needs to take place for economic, financial and diplomatic issues, and that is also true for welfare issues. Perhaps it is time to reconsider a standard we have taken for granted.

I think that, in the future, the notion of Normalization should be set as a foundation of welfare policy. It is a concept that persons who face difficulties, such as the elderly people who cannot walk by themselves and people with intellectual and physical disabilities, are not atypical, and rather a society where there are persons who have difficulties is a normal human society. Human society is not the military. There are strong persons and weak persons, persons who can walk and persons who cannot walk, persons who can see and persons who cannot see; that is human society as it is. Based on these premises, the concept promotes to prepare a whole society with consideration for persons with disabilities; that is Normalization.

Following these philosophies, about 20 countries in the world legally mandate that all public buildings must be designed and built to be accessible to everyone including persons with disabilities. Some of these countries also are pursuing, so-called, inclusive education where children with disabilities play together with other children. One country even has Braille dots on their currency. Once such considerations have become prevalent, many people who are called persons with disabilities would no longer be socially disabled at all. It is because a disability is something that appears in the relationship between an individual and his or her environment. I believe measures to improve education, employment, and independence of children and persons with disabilities should also be pursued based on such a perspective.

Firstly, I would like to obtain a response from the Prime Minister, the Ministers of Welfare, Labor, and Education as to how they would receive such a proposal as an issue related to the basic attitude of welfare policy of our country.

Further, I would also like to know if you have any intention to legally mandate, as a substantive first step, that all future public buildings that are to be built must be designed and built to be accessible for persons with disabilities.

Secondly, by a resolution of the UN General Assembly, the next year,

the year 1981, is the International Year of Disabled Persons, and I would also like to inquire as to how we, as a nation, are going to address this.

My first question on this topic is about the stance of the Prime Minister.

In the last Diet session, Prime Minister, you stated that you would like to address measures regarding the International Year of Disabled Persons following the passage of the resolution by the UN General Assembly. I found such a passive attitude very disappointing. Making next year the International Year of Disabled Persons actually was passed by the UN General Assembly five years ago, and this issue has been discussed every year since, while the UN's basic directions have been clear for a quite long time. That is not all. When the UN General Assembly passed the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons, which laid the foundation for the International Year of Disabled Persons, our nation was a co-sponsor of the resolution. Despite that, why have we not yet come up with any clear measures? It is truly shameful.

The theme of the International Year of Disabled Persons is "full participation and equality." I would like to request the Prime Minister's answer on how you receive and understand this theme and plan to bear responsibility to the world members with Japan as a co-sponsor of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons.

Secondly, I would like to request that we break with the traditional notion that all issues regarding persons with disabilities are dealt with solely by the Ministry of Health and Welfare.

For example, many people with disabilities often have extreme difficulties with the public transportation system; a major obstacle for them becoming socially independent. Of course, welfare administrators should resolve this issue, but in addition, it is also an issue pertinent to the basic stance of the transportation administration. The Ministry of Transport should not exclude persons with disabilities from its policy measures. Similarly, it is necessary that each ministry, while partnering with the Ministry of Health and Welfare, should institute measures in their respective fields and take up their responsibilities. The Fundamental Law for Countermeasures for Mentally and Physically Handicapped Persons was established in 1970 considering such points. However, it is clearly evident that our government has rather neglected this legislation. I would like to hear the opinion of the Prime Minister on this point.

I also believe that there is a necessity in establishing a new framework within the Prime Minister's Office in order to review the welfare policies based on this Fundamental Law, and promote synthetic and systematic approaches for persons with mental and physical disabilities, utilizing this opportunity of the International Year of Disabled Persons. I would, again, like to also solicit the Prime Minister's opinion on such a proposal.

The third point is regarding the international position of our nation for this International Year of Disabled Persons.

There are criticisms of our nation with description such as being an Economic Animal; I think the criticism is aimed not only at the economic activities of our country. I think it comes from the concern that Japanese nation may be the type of people who do not mind treading upon and are disdainful of weak people. The current situation in our country, where the human rights of persons with disabilities are not protected, would be naturally seen that way by other countries. This is a serious issue of international credibility. Based on the above points and taking this occasion of the International Year of Disabled Persons, I believe we have to develop a powerful and heartfelt welfare diplomacy. I would like to hear the response from both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister on this subject.

Lastly, please allow me to make a few statements.

Having disabilities on its own is not necessarily a misfortune. Rather, the misfortune is in being prevented from studying together, working together, and participating equally in one's local community because one has disabilities. That is not only a misfortune for the person who has disabilities; it is a misfortune for the whole society, because the society that discards weak people is a feeble and fragile society. It sustains the possibility that anyone can instantly become a member of the weak. In order to realize a society where persons with disabilities are not socially disabled and the words persons with disabilities becomes obsolete in Japanese society, now is the time to take our powerful steps. I genuinely wish that, what the Prime Minister often calls a Japanese-style welfare, is in the same spirit. I will end my questions here.

Prime Minister (Mr. Masayoshi Ohira): Mr. Yashiro, in your moving questions, pointed out that our current society was created having healthy people as the standard, and therefore such society deprives the rights of

persons with disabilities, and that it is high time to reflect on such a society.

As you stated, we have to admit that the system of the current Japanese society is still taking a healthy people as the standard. Persons with disabilities are, of course, just as you said, constitutive members of our present society. I think it is necessary to make sure that such considerations are made in all areas, such as in politics, economics and culture, so that these people can live a life just like healthy people, at home and in their local community.

Secondly, Mr. Yashiro proposed that the notion of Normalization should be set as a foundation towards the goal of a welfare society where persons who have difficulties in daily life such as people with disabilities can live just as other people.

I believe it is a major political challenge to realize a society where persons with disabilities can freely participate in activities in a society as persons without disabilities do and enjoy their lives in all fields of present society. It is especially important to obtain the understanding and support of our citizens for the realization of such a welfare society and while bearing these thoughts in mind, I would like to make strive for that goal.