

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Today, we would like to ask Prof. Yasushi Katsuma from Waseda University a couple of questions. Prof. Katsuma, thank you for your time today.

I'm Katsuma. Thank you.

We would like to ask you three things today. First, please tell us why you think UHC is important, based on your experience at UNICEF. Second, why does Japan intend to promote UHC internationally? We would like to know its significance. And finally, if you have a message for us from young generation, please share it with us. First of all, why do you think UHC is important? Tell us your experiences at UNICEF.

Yes. I am currently a faculty member at Waseda University. Before that, I worked in developing countries as a staff member of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The first country where I was assigned was Mexico. That was back in 1998. In Mexico, I was involved in nutrition surveys of children. I noticed that in the southern states of Mexico, such as Chiapas or Oaxaca, the nutritional status of children was seriously low. Looking at such data, it was clear to me that there were significant disparities among states within the same country. Also, I noticed that the nutritional status of indigenous children was very alarming in comparison with other children even within the same state.

Looking at the disparity within a country, I felt that the problem was that there were many dimensions of disparities not captured well, despite the slogan "health for all." After that, I moved to Afghanistan in 2000. Afghanistan was far from the slogan of "health for all." First, there were many children who were not vaccinated due to the internal conflicts. In Afghanistan, polio was still endemic. To implement national immunization days for polio vaccination, a temporary ceasefire had to be agreed between the Taliban side and the Northern Alliance. Even if they concluded a truce to promote vaccination, we faced a difficulty in entering into the area where ethnic minorities lived. Also, from the perspective of reproductive health, women were often discouraged to go out of their homes in Afghanistan where home birth is common. Therefore, even if a pregnant woman required medical services, it was difficult for her to leave the house to go to health facilities.

We often talk about "three delays." First of all, deciding to seek medical services may be delayed. And even if you want to seek medical services, there is another delay due to lack of means of transportation or maintained roads. Third, even if you get to the hospital, there may be issues such as the lack of medical and health workers who can provide high-quality medical services, or the lack of essential drugs and medicines. In that sense, even though we say "health for all," there are lots of people who have been deprived of their rights to health in many parts of the world, including Afghanistan. Under such circumstances, we need to keep advocating for UHC, "health for all."

Thank you. The next question is, why does Japan promote UHC internationally? Please tell us its significance.

Japan considers the concept of human security as one of the pillars of diplomacy. That

means providing safety and security for everyone, and we can say that “health for all” is a very important area. In that sense, Japan is promoting UHC based on the principle of human security, while promoting international cooperation. The national health insurance system was quickly established in Japan. We have developed into such a country with high life expectancy, so I think that there is also an aspect of conveying experiences to other developing countries based on Japan's experience. Of course, there are so many different situations in developing countries, so I think it is difficult to replicate the Japanese experiences in other countries, but I believe promoting UHC in a way that suits each country is important.

Also, Japan was the host country of the G20 summit this year, and not only discussing the importance of UHC among the health ministers by holding the Health Ministers' Meeting, but also at the Joint Session of Finance and Health Ministers. I think that Japan played a very important role by convincing the Finance Ministers about the importance of investing in national health insurance system and UHC.

Thank you, Prof. Katsuma. Finally, do you have a message for us from young generations?

My message for the young people is that I hope that all of you will become global health leaders. First of all, the most important thing is that everyone has the right to health, and that “health for all” is listed as one of the international goals. In addition, among the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs9, the achievement of universal health coverage (UHC) has been agreed by all UN member states. In that sense, this is something that the international community has agreed to proceed, but in order to promote it in developing countries with different backgrounds, your leadership is very important. As each country has already agreed to achieve universal health coverage (UHC), I hope that all the young people in the world will work as global health leaders in their respective roles.

Next is a message for Japanese youth. I have just talked about the promotion of UHC in developing countries, but in Japan where we live, there are actually people who have been left out of UHC. I would like you to think a little about that. In Japan, there are migrant workers and refugees as well, and there may be people who are left out of UHC due to some kind of poverty and violence within the country. I would like you to think a little about those who have not been able to enjoy UHC here in Japan, which we take for granted, while Japan is undergoing major demographic changes, and what we should do in order to realize their right to health.

Thank you, Prof. Katsuma. After I listened to what you said and got to know how passionate you are about the issue, that there may be people who have been left out of UHC even though Japan introduced the national health insurance system, I felt again that it is necessary to consciously tackle this issue. Thank you very much.

Thank you for listening.