



13th March 2020

Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister,
Mr. Tadamori Oshima, President, House of Representatives,
Ms. Akiko Santo, President, House of Councilors,

Satoko Fujitani, President
Yumiko Ozaki, General Secretary
YWCA of Japan

Letter of Protest Against the Revision of Special Measures Law to Tackle New Types of Influenza and Other Infectious Diseases

The Japanese Government made a cabinet decision on a bill to revise the special law special measures law to tackle new types of influenza and other infectious diseases (hereafter “special law”) as a prevention measure against COVID-19 spread, which will enable the announcement of a “state of emergency” . The bill was submitted to the Diet and was enacted without adequate discussion on 13th May.

The existing special law, since its enactment on 2012, has been questioned its scientific basis and has had many problems pointed out, including a wide-range limitation on private rights and major impact on civilian life and economic activities. Especially, when the Prime Minister announces a “state of emergency” , prefectural Governors are authorized to request residents to refrain from leaving their homes, and to request or order restrictions in the usage of schools and other institutions, widely limiting constitutional human rights including the freedom of movement and assembly. Furthermore, by naming private-sector broadcast stations as “assigned public institutions” , the government is enabled to interfere with the press, which may affect the freedom of press and the people’ s right to information.

The Government is meant to protect the freedom and rights of its people; however, history has already seen governments terminating the constitution that puts limits to its authority in the name of a national crisis, and abusing its massive powers and causing massive human rights violation and collapse of democracy, major examples being the Japanese empire and the Nazis Regime. Further still, it is impossible not to question the act of entrusting emergency decisions on the current regime, which continuously refuses to provide adequate explanation and accountability on scandals surrounding the Prime Minister, including Moritomo and Kake school scandal and “cherry blossom party” scandal.

Without acknowledging the Government's failure on early response to the COVID-19 crisis and thus allowing for the expansion of the virus in Japan, Prime Minister Abe caused major confusion and uncertainty by haphazard measures, including suddenly deciding to close all schools throughout Japan with hardly any prior notice.

The YWCA of Japan works for a society where every single person is respected and the dignity of women and children are protected. What the Government should do now is not changing the law in order to strengthen its own powers in the name of "emergency", but to protect the lives of citizens before anything. Prevention measures should be promptly conducted with sound scientific basis, accurate information should be provided to ease uncertainty, and broad measures should be put in place to support those who are put in vulnerable positions.

Therefore, we urge the Government to retract the revision on the special law allowing for a "state of emergency" declaration that would threaten democracy and human rights, and to reconsider the law.