

Statement on WAW! /W20:
We Need a Transformation to Just Economic System
where Rights of All Women would be Fully Protected,
Not “Women’s Empowerment” for the Sake of the Economic Growth

As Japan will host G20 Summit in June 2019, Japanese government is organizing the 5th International World Assembly for Women (WAW!) in 23-24 March 2019 in Tokyo, aiming at women’s economic empowerment, in collaboration with “Women 20 (W20),” an official engagement group of G20 to make policy recommendations regarding women.

As shown in the slogan “Closing the gender gap for new prosperity,” WAW!/W20 seeks for a happy marriage between the goal of the economic growth and the goal of gender equality. The event emphasizes that accelerating women’s active participation in labor market, corporate management, entrepreneurship and technology development will help states and business in their pursuit for the growth, and that building this sort of “win-win” relationship will lead to the global capitalism where “no one is left behind.”

As a matter of fact, however, leaders of the global capitalism has failed to create “win-win” relationship where the fruits of the growth would benefit all people. Rather, they have created and keep widening extreme gap where only 1% of world population get more wealth than the rest of 99%. Unacceptable level of poverty is found, not only in the places that lack the growth, but also in the areas where there is strong growth and among world wealthiest nations of G20. Thus, if we want to bring about equal global economy, we should ask what kind of ideologies and biases help justify such extreme injustice, rather than asking how to generate the growth and how to utilize women’s power for that purpose.

Among the G20, Japan is one of the nations where economic disparity is fast growing. Single mothers and single women are particularly vulnerable to fall into poverty, given the labor policies and social security systems that have made male-bread-winner-family as the norm, while shifting labor reproduction costs onto unpaid work borne by women in households. Furthermore, deregulation of labor, weakened social security and the rise of “self-responsibility” ideology in recent years have further shifted collective security to individual responsibility, increasing pressure on people for survival.

Although WAW!/W20 does touch upon some of those problems of gendered economic system, especially problems with work practices, its view on the economy is too narrow and too focused on the growth. We are afraid that this sort of arguments for gender equality with strong focus on the growth may not only fail to address gender bias embedded in the global capitalism, but also justify rights violation against people who don’t conform to the dominant labor and family models, driving division of women between those who could contribute to the growth and those who could not.

We are especially concerned about the lack of discussion about rights of migrant women who are often placed at the bottom of the global economy and made invisible in the framework of national economies. The serious problems of declining population and the lack of labor force that Japan faces with are results of the existing economic system that has ignored care and reproductive labor as just “women’s work.” However, rather than addressing these fundamental contradictions of the economic system, Japanese government and business leaders are increasingly depending on migrant workers as cheap labor that they do not care about its reproducing costs.

Migrant women have experienced the double bind of racial and sexual discriminations embedded in Japanese economic system. They are expected to take over underestimated “women’s work” such as care work, household work and unstable manual labor that have been borne by Japanese women, while supporting their own families with insufficient public support. Those on unstable residential status are especially vulnerable to serious sexual violence or domestic violence due to racial and sexual discriminations. Particularly vulnerable are those in Japan on trainee status. Their fundamental rights as workers including reproductive health and rights are severely restricted, as shown in the cases or serious human rights violations where female trainees who get pregnant are forced to return home or abort, and even arrested for abandoning the newborn child for the fear or being forced to return.

If Japanese government, corporations and leaders of the global economy truly seek to achieve economic empowerment of ALL women, they should look at the reality that the existing economic system to pursue the growth while neglecting needs of human reproduction has caused serious social damages, and that social damages have been transferred onto most vulnerable people such as migrant women who face gender and racial discriminations.

While WAW!/W20 celebrates “diversity,” this term should not be used to justify disparities among women and difficulties faced by women who experience not only gender-based discrimination but also discriminations based on nationality, class, race and other factors. We reject “women’s empowerment” for the sake of achieving the growth, which would benefit only well-endowed women at the expense of underprivileged women. We demand fundamental transformation to a just economic system where rights of all women and all people are fully protected.

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Asia-Japan Women’s Resource Center
<http://www.ajwrc.org/eng/>

Solidarity Network with Migrants Japan
<http://migrants.jp/>