



PGPD Conference/study tour report

Please send to PGPD secretariat on email secretariat@pgpd.asn.au or fax 02 6282 8933.

Title of conference / study tour	The 23 rd Asian Parliamentarians Meeting on Population and Sustainable Development – Towards the next 25 years.
Name of participant	Dr Mal Washer
Dates attended	21 st , 22 nd , 23 rd February 2007
Location	Tokyo, Japan
Purpose of the meeting/conference	
Networking with similar groups throughout the world.	
Sessions similar to the Australian experience, e.g.	
1. Demographic transition and population ageing in Asia: some lessons from the Japanese experience.	
Makato Atoh demonstrated Japanese experience with fertility transition from high to low levels and resultant population 'bonus'. (Countries which succeeded in the fertility transition have the highest proportion of working age population and lowest levels of supporting children and the elderly - compared to the working age population – for at least three decades. This period of 'bonus' is a chance for achieving economic development as exemplified by Japan which achieved its highest period of economic growth after the completion of the fertility transition at the end of the 1950s.) Japan has now one of the lowest levels of fertility in the world (1.3). The resulting problem with an ageing population is very similar to Australia's. The big difference is that our population levels will not decline at the same rate because of immigration and a higher birthrate.	
2. Infectious diseases as global issues and human security.	
Nobuhiko Okabe MD PhD noted the development of antimicrobial resistance, animal diseases crossing into human populations and globalization of travel and trade. He saw the inappropriate social, political and economic responses to outbreaks as problems in the new changing world. It was acknowledged by all countries that Australia is probably the most advanced country in the world in gearing up for a possible H5N1 flu epidemic. Other countries will follow our example.	
3. Future of human beings as affected by environment: water resources and food.	
Emeritus professor E. Uchijama gave an excellent and detailed lecture. One of the main points was the leading role that vegetation and biomass play. The conclusions said it all, namely: humans are dependent on global ecosystems because of their ultimate dependence on solar energy which is fixated by green plants; human activities have developed exponentially since the Industrial Revolution; human impact on the global environment is increasing and may have exceeded the critical level at which sustainable development is still possible; thus a new guiding principle is necessary for the continued existence of both human beings and wild species that requires a gradual reduction in human impact on the environment; but if this revolution fails then human beings will destroy the global environment and cause the extinction of wild species.	
4. Benefits of international labour migration and its negative impacts in a globalized world.	
Mitsuko Horiuchi, former assistant director general of the ILO, said there were 86 million new migrants a year, more than population growth, driven by the growing income disparity between rich and poor countries. Despite the large numbers, there was a freer flow of goods and capital than of people. Female migrants constitute nearly half, many of them domestic workers who are vulnerable to exploitation. Migrants are usually drawn from middle income households who, when established abroad, help poorer friends and relatives to join them. Small national economies are the most vulnerable to a brain drain from highly skilled migration. On the whole, migration has been beneficial to most	



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migrants and to countries of destination and origin (through remittances). Migration contributes to diversity and to the formation and mobility of human capital. On the other hand, migrants are often vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, discrimination and social exclusion. Migration may also lead to social tension and have social costs.

5. Roundtable discussion in which I was one of six participants.

Thoraya Obaid, Executive Director of the UNFPA, addressed the conference saying there needs to be a focus on human security. We are not secure, she said, when confronted by widespread poverty, environmental destruction, when women experience violence, and when all are confronted by poor health and disease. The right to health is a top priority including the right to sexual and reproductive health. Not only do we need to guarantee universal access to SRH by 2015 (the new target under MDG5) but also slow population growth down in countries currently experiencing rapid growth to give them the ability to attack poverty, protect and repair the environment and build the base for future sustainable development. Population growth is still a matter of concern because countries with large youth populations living in poverty are more prone to civil conflict and such countries are less likely to achieve development goals. Meeting the unmet need for contraception must be a priority.

Key outcomes relevant to PGPD:

1. The presentations and organization by the Japanese PGPD were excellent and it is evident that the Japanese Government is taking it seriously largely because the group has made significant inroads into the Cabinet.

2. The networking was excellent. The Indonesians and Malaysians were very enthusiastic and keen to attend further meetings. Likewise representatives of new nations from the former USSR such as Kurdistan and Turkmenistan who are anxious to come to Australia and learn about setting up good democracies (good governance). They are also gas-rich and need to improve Occupational Health and Safety standards. Lots of doctors were there from such countries as South Korea and Singapore, concerned about environment issues like water. South Korea has many issues to confront such as ageing – similar to the Japanese situation. Steve Chadwick and Sue Kedgery from New Zealand were there and wanting to visit Australia's PGPD. Two dynamic people from the Philippines attended, concerned about the power of the Catholic Church and its impeding the dissemination of sexual and reproductive health information in schools – a similar situation exists in South America. Japanese and Singaporean doctors were most impressed with what Australia is doing in terms of infectious disease preparation such as SARS and Avian flu.

3.

4.



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Feedback to PGPD Secretariat regarding conference/ study tour organisation, relevance, and impact

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- Possible actions following conference/ study tour**
- Speak:
 - In the next meeting of the PGPD
 - In parliamentary debates
 - To constituents, party, other parliamentary colleagues
 - Write recommendations to relevant Ministers
 - Put questions on notice or in estimates hearings
 - Sponsor a Private Member's Motion
 - Organise an event in Parliament
 - Issue a press release and organise a press conference upon your return
 - Write articles based on your study tour experiences and what you have learned for: newspapers, parliamentary media, party media, electorate newsletters etc



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Personal actions/ follow-up to the conference/study tour (if any)

Officially invite the New Zealand PGPD Chair to come to Australia to meet with the Federal PGPD.

Recommendations for PGPD in light of conference eg letter to Minister, parliamentary motion etc

Note the report above.

Note that the Japanese have engaged their Cabinet colleagues. We must do it better by engaging our own senior politicians at the highest level.

Signed _____ Mal Washer _____ Date 29 March
2007 _____