Guiding Questions for the focus areas of the X Session of the Open-ended

Working Group on Ageing: Education, training, life-long learning and capacitybuilding

１．The right to education of all citizens is established under Article 26 of the Japanese Constitution, while the principle of life-long learning is established under the Basic Act on Education. Life-long learning in older age is covered under the Life-Long Learning Promotion Act and Articles 9 and 11 of the Basic Law on Measures for the Aging Society, which impose the obligation upon the national and local governments to establish a supportive environment for life-long learning.

２．The environment supporting the study of older persons is inadequate, and older persons are left to decide and arrange their own education and life-long learning.

* Exercise has been recommended to increase the number of healthy older persons with the primary aim of preventing a rise in the cost of care insurance which is used to provide care for those aged 65 and over. From the perspective of older persons’ right to learning and right to health, it is problematic that the focus is placed on the finances of healthcare for older persons.
* The implementation of life-long learning is dependent on the local government for whether or not it happens, the variety in educational content, the economic cost to the user, and accessibility.
* Financial support from the government is either low or non-existent for NPOs and community organizations engaged in life-long learning.
* While there is a great variety of education on offer, its educational content does not correspond to the needs of older persons today.
* There are very few opportunities for older persons to use the knowledge and experience they gain through life-long learning. In particular, there are hardly any opportunities for older persons to participate in government decision-making processes.

３．The life-long learning of older persons as provided by local government is primarily implemented by the welfare administration and the education administration. The welfare administration primarily holds activities focused on the maintenance of health and living standards, while the education administration primarily holds educational activities based in “Older People Universities” and community centers. The educational activities are attended by specialist social education supervisors. These activities are available to all older persons, but in recent years most local governments have seen their budgets for such activities shrink. In their place have come an increasing number of educational opportunities offered by for-profit organizations, NPOs and the community, while local governments have expended their efforts on personnel training such as for coordinators. Personnel training alone does not meet the needs or make education available to all older persons.

Moreover, there has been a push in recent years on the basis of the Long-Term Care Insurance Act toward exercise as a means of care prevention among healthy older persons. The emphasis is on preventing increases in the cost of long-term care insurance rather than on the right to education or right to health of older persons, which are overlooked.

NGOs provide many venues for learning. For example, they provide the venue for the annually held Convention for Japan Older Persons in accordance with the needs of its participants, which is attended by approximately 4,000 older persons. Moreover, at the Open University of Japan where education is primarily provided by correspondence, 26.3% of students are aged 60 or over, and older persons have the opportunity to learn much.

4. There is no nationwide consolidated data available. Most local governments have PR magazines and websites providing guidance on what is available to older persons. However, there are disparities in what local governments provide.

　In terms of (survey) studies, the government (Cabinet Office) annually carries out the “National Survey on Aging Population” and publishes the aggregate and analyzed results on its website. In terms of education, the most relevant studies are the “Survey of Attitudes among the Elderly toward Participation in Local Communities” (2013) and the “Public Opinion Survey on Life-long Learning” (2018), which survey the access, use and satisfaction of older persons concerning educational opportunities.

５. In Japan, there are no laws prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of age in relation to education. However, while the percentage of people aged 25 and over as a proportion of university entrants is currently close to the OECD average of 20% and includes a considerable number of adult students, the proportion of Japanese adult students is low at 1.9%.

Most NPOs that provide learning to older persons receive very little support from local governments, and also have to pay a rental fee when using public facilities. In effect, this infringes upon the right to education and right to learning of older persons.

6. In Japan, no such mechanisms are in place. We believe it is necessary on the national level to establish individual laws that clearly specify the right to education and right to learning of older persons, as well as a law prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of age. We also believe it is necessary on the local level to create: (1) an appeal system for older persons and for friends/family to appeal on an older person’s behalf; (2) an independent ombudsman system to try to resolve government-based discrimination; and (3) a system where older persons are able to participate in government and administrative processes relating to older persons.