

The Speech of Mr. Kato Katsunobu Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japan  
in OECD Second Ministerial Council Roundtable

Thank you chair.

In an effort to curb the spread of infections of COVID-19, Japan also declared a state of emergency and people complied thoroughly with the request to stay home. Consequently, the significant restrictions on socio-economic activities have had a huge impact on people's jobs and daily lives. Since employment issues follow the spread of infection, we need to consider both the current situation and future developments when taking supporting measures. In this context, we have been making efforts to maintain employment by expanding subsidy to support business owners who provided leave allowance to their employees while closing temporarily or reducing business hours due to business contraction.

In addition, we are helping business owners with reduced sales to continue their businesses by providing them with cash benefits, such as rent subsidy. Furthermore, we established subsidy programs for business owners who provided paid leave for pregnant workers. This has allowed workers to take leave without feeling anxious about their livelihoods. Japan's unemployment rate currently stands at 2.9%. Nevertheless, the employment situation, taken as a whole, faces a difficult phase, as the number of furloughed is rapidly increasing while that of non-regular workers is dropping sharply. It has been pointed out that a higher unemployment rate raise the number of suicides. Consequently, we have been taking all possible measures to protect the Japanese population employing the philosophy that protecting employment leads to protecting not only people's livelihoods but also their lives.

At the same time, this crisis can also be an opportunity to build a sustainable future of work in the mid- to long-term. For instance, with government impetus, telework has been rapidly increasing in both the public and private sectors. By taking appropriate solutions for identified issues, we need to create an environment where people can work more comfortably and effectively.

Restrictions on socio-economic activities have had a significant impact on vulnerable people, such as single parent families and those in need. We are collecting comments and proposals from those who are supporting vulnerable people at the frontline, such as non-governmental organizations and social workers, so as to expand our support capacity.

Cooperation and collective wisdom of the international community are indispensable for overcoming the coronavirus crisis. We expect a continued contribution from the OECD through analysis and collecting up-to-date information on measures taken by member countries.

Thank you.