

The 51st Union World Conference on Lung Health
Opening Ceremony

20 October 2020

Your Excellencies,
Honored guests,
Distinguished members of the Union,
Conference participants,

It is a great pleasure for me to participate virtually in this 51st Union World Conference on Lung Health. I would like to thank all those who have made this conference possible this year, which has been a difficult period of time for all of us, because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I am also grateful to the numerous professionals with experience in our fight against TB, who have been making great contributions in the global fight against COVID-19.

The World Health Organization has named 2020 the International Year of the Nurse and Midwife, and I would like to acknowledge the critical role that nurses and midwives are playing in the response to COVID-19. For instance, in the case of Japan, public health centers and public health nurses have been devoted to preventing the spread of the disease through measures such as counseling patients and coordinating their hospitalization.

At the same time, COVID-19 is creating an extremely great challenge to our efforts on public health. This is a historic challenge that is affecting every country in the world, and there is a risk that years of progress against TB may be reversed.

We can and must prevent this from happening.

The Union has a vital role, with its members so important in our efforts

relating to TB and lung health. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to you, the members of The Union, who must have been working extremely hard to fight against TB at this very difficult time. I am also very grateful to The Union for disseminating valuable information around the world.

You have the knowledge, you have the experience, you have the influence that the world needs right now. I would like to convey my deep respect to The Union which has a long history of working together against TB and other respiratory diseases, uniting efforts to achieve health globally over the past 100 years.

Thanks to the efforts of the past 100 years, we are gifted with so many tools. We are very fortunate to have measures to prevent TB. However, we still have a problem. The problem is that we are yet to fully implement the means that we already have in our hands. The theme of this year's conference, Advancing Prevention, is so timely. I am sure that our conference will be a very fruitful one for everyone.

We are also facing challenges related to human nature. Fears and anxieties may fuel the dangers of exclusion and stigma, which work against proper prevention, diagnosis and treatment. Smoking continues to be another problem related to human nature. But I know many people, including health professionals and volunteers in civil society, who care for the physical and mental health of everybody, including vulnerable people. I appreciate their activities very much. Japan Anti Tuberculosis Association Women's Society, which has been voluntarily carrying out activities to increase public awareness of TB in local communities, is one example.

The Union gives us hope. The Union brings us together from so many parts of the world toward the common goal of ending TB. We shall continue our precious task to bring about a healthier world for all of us, for our children, and for future generations.

Thank you very much.