

Opening and Welcome Address

18 July 2020 14:00

My name is Matsubara Yoko. As the vice president of Ritsumeikan University, I am in charge of research as well as inclusion and diversity. It is our great pleasure to host and welcome you all to this webinar on COVID-19 and persons with disabilities in East Asia. This webinar is taking place as East Asia Disability Studies Forum 2020, organized by our Institute of Ars Vivendi. I served as vice director of Institute of Ars Vivendi and continue to be engaged with its activities. In fact we were looking forward to hosting this Forum face-to-face in Kyoto coming September. But the COVID-19 has made it impossible, as you all understand.

I find the topic of this Forum very much relevant. As an academic and research institution, we need to face COVID-19 squarely. That is why our university is now calling for submissions for the Proposal-Based Research Program With Corona Society -Visionaries for the New Normal, to encourage our researchers to work on this pandemic, including its ethical, legal, and social issues.

COVID-19 has affected our way of life in so many ways. For instance, as we have started on-line lectures, our students need PCs or other communication terminals and Wi-Fi environments at home. We have, therefore, announced Emergency Relief Package in Response to the COVID-19 Outbreak with the budget of 2.5 billion yen, the equivalent of 2 million Euro. I do believe that we should do our absolute best to make sure the existing gaps, such as poverty among others, do not get worse at a minimum.

That obviously applies to persons with disabilities. As we continue to promote inclusion and diversity across the board, our fight with ableism and discrimination against persons with disabilities is all the more important. We cannot accept giving low priority to people because of their disabilities during this pandemic and beyond. In my country of Japan, ableism and eugenic ideology demonstrated themselves in the form of a law which allowed the state to sterilize persons with disabilities until 1996. And only four years ago, 19 persons with disabilities were killed at a care facility.

Ableism is a global and regional challenge and we have to fight against it together. As we all work on the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities through the implementation of SDGs and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities throughout East Asia, we can continue to learn from each other and help each other. And this Forum, with a history of 11 years, continues to serve as an important platform for intellectual dialogue and discussions in our region.

In closing, I thank each one of you for joining us on-line today and hope to meet you all in Kyoto in person next year.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.