

**EU ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD  
2019 COUNTRY UPDATES**

**pp.205-207**

## **Japan**

**1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation:** Japan is an established and well-functioning democracy, which in general terms ensures a high level of respect for human rights. Japan is also advocating worldwide promotion of those values and the respect of international obligations, including in international fora. Japan plays an important role in the Human Rights Council, in which it was re-elected until 2022, and in the UN General Assembly 3<sup>rd</sup> Committee.

However, the retention of the death penalty in Japan remains a major concern for the EU. Three executions took place in 2019. Despite government efforts to address the issue in recent years, gender equality remains behind most major developed economies. The issue of child abduction by parents persists in spite of the adoption of domestic legislation. The rights of LGBTI persons are not widely debated publicly, but progress has taken place at local government level. The entry into force in 2019 of the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement renews hopes of the ratification by Japan of the ILO conventions on forced labour and discrimination.

The EU and Japan hold dedicated human rights consultations, but did not hold any regular meeting in 2019, although ad-hoc discussions took place. Human rights issues continued to be discussed at all levels of the relationship, reinforced by the provisional application since February 2019 of the EU-Japan Strategic Partnership Agreement.

**2. EU action - key focus areas:** The EU action in Japan in 2019 focused on the death penalty, gender equality, non-discrimination (LGBTI issues), rights of the child, criminal justice and prisoner's rights, and support to civil society.

**3. EU bilateral political engagement:** The EU continued to take a firm stance against the persisting use of death penalty in Japan, and expressed its position through local statements, as Japan conducted three executions in August and December 2019. The EU also encouraged public debate on the issue and supported the participation of two Japanese attorneys to the World Congress against the Death Penalty held in Brussels. On prisoner's rights, the EU delegation and the Finish Presidency organised a presentation by three officials from the Justice Ministry on the topic 'Japanese prisons and foreign inmates prison conditions'.

As regards gender equality, on the occasion of HR/VP Mogherini's visit to Japan to attend the G20 Foreign Ministers' meeting in November, a high level event on the 'Role of Women and Youth in Peace and Security' was organised by the EU delegation with the participation of Japanese Defense Minister Kono. During the visit to Japan of the Council of Europe in May 2019, an informal exchange meeting with the Advisory Group members and other experts was organised on the topic of Istanbul Convention. On 21 December, the Head of the EU Delegation took part, as one of the panellists, in a symposium titled 'Women can change the World', organised by the Showa Women's University.

Public diplomacy remained an important component of the EU's work on human rights in Japan. On 28 April, the EU delegation and embassies of the EU Member States took part in the parade and other elements of the popular Tokyo Rainbow Pride event, which attracted

the largest ever 200,000 visitors. The EU delegation also engaged young Japanese social media influencers who created their own videos on TikTok to address important issues such as family unity, bullying and equality, to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Convention on Rights of the Child. The EU delegation's magazine also published an article explaining how the EU has addressed the promotion of the rights with focus on the child abduction issue and on the right to family unity. The EU delegation continued to support the strengthening of Japanese civil society, by engaging civil society at various occasions during the year, including by holding networking events.

**4. EU financial engagement:** The EU delegation manages a two-year, EUR 222,000 Partnership Instrument project, 'Engagement with Civil Society in Japan on Fundamental Rights: Death Penalty and the Criminal Justice System', to support civil society-led activities to promote awareness of the criminal justice system in relation to the death penalty in Japan. The project partner 'Center for prisoner's rights' has created a website that provides pedagogical material on issues related to criminal justice in Japan, including arrest, detention and prosecution.

In the field of gender equality, the 'WE EMPOWER' project, benefits from EUR 1.5 million in Japan aiming to support sustainable, inclusive and equitable economic growth through: (i) advocacy and multi-stakeholder policy dialogues; and (ii) building capacity in the private sector in line with internationally agreed Women Empowerment Principles. The Advisory Group of the project met three times in 2019 to provide project guidance and facilitate engagement with industry and government representatives. The project will focus on gender-lens investing and women in workplace. In March, WE EMPOWER organised a session, as part of Women 20 (W20) held in Tokyo, on the topic 'Gender Lens Investing: Emerging Global Trends' where the EEAS Principal Advisor on Gender, Mara Marinaki, gave an opening speech.

In 2019, the project supported by the EU together with the OECD and the ILO 'Responsible Supply Chains in Asia' made progress in all three components of research, outreach and training. Among others, surveys were carried out to measure awareness and actual implementation of responsible business practices in supply chains; several workshops and technical seminars have been organised targeting trade unions, cooperatives, industry associations and research institutions. Key materials and guidance on responsible business practices were translated into Japanese.

**5. Multilateral context:** The EU and Japan continued to cooperate closely, but sometimes faced challenges in agreeing on joint approaches in UN fora. Japan did not co-author the resolution on DPRK with the EU in the 40<sup>th</sup> session of the UN Human Rights Council as it usually does, but eventually agreed to co-sponsor the resolution on DPRK in the UN General Assembly. Japan also abstained on the resolution on Sri Lanka and on the resolution extending the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Myanmar, and opposed the death penalty resolution.

The ratification of the ILO conventions on forced labour and discrimination continues to be part of the EU engagement with Japan, in particular in light of the entry into force of the Economic Partnership Agreement. The Plenary of the House of Representatives adopted a 'Resolution on Japan's further commitment toward ILO, on the occasion of 100 year anniversary of ILO' on 26 June, just before the G20 Summit in Osaka.