

## ROLE SHEET

# Japan

## CONTEXT:

Japan's approach to women's issues and the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda reflects a blend of historical influences, societal norms, and recent policy initiatives. Historically, Japan has grappled with its patriarchal societal structure, impacting women's roles and rights. Despite this, there have been significant strides in addressing women's issues, particularly in the post-World War II era. The country's pacifist constitution and military neutrality policy have shaped its approach to peace and security, emphasizing humanitarian aid and non-military means of conflict resolution.

In the realm of the WPS agenda, Japan has made notable advancements. The country's National Action Plan (NAP) on WPS, adopted in 2015 and updated in 2019, illustrates a commitment to integrating women's perspectives in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and post-conflict recovery. This NAP aligns with the primary pillars of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, focusing on participation, prevention, protection, and humanitarian and reconstruction assistance.<sup>1</sup>

However, Japan's WPS initiatives and gender equality policies have faced criticism. Feminist scholars have pointed out that while Japan emphasizes the protection of women and girls, there is often a portrayal of women as victims rather than as agents of change. Moreover, the language used in policy documents sometimes conflates gender issues with women's issues, sidelining broader gender power dynamics<sup>2</sup>. Despite these challenges, Japan's efforts towards a "society where women shine" have led to increased women's participation in the labor force and leadership roles.<sup>3</sup>

Japan's recent "Development Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment" prioritizes gender-responsive infrastructure, education, and leadership, especially in disaster risk reduction. While Japan continues to navigate its patriarchal societal norms, its commitment to the WPS agenda and gender equality is evident in its policy initiatives and international contributions.

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<sup>1</sup> (N.A.) "Japan – 1325 National Action Plan". Women's International League for Peace & Freedom

<sup>2</sup> Jung, Yeonju & Tsujisaka, Ayako. (2019). Language matters: The women, peace and security agenda in Japan and South Korea. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

<sup>3</sup> (N.A.) "Japan vows to boost women's leadership and development assistance for gender equality". UN Women

### IN SUPPORT OF:

As Japanese delegates enter negotiations, there are items that they would like to discuss and are willing to push to include in the Regional Action Plan:

1. Establish international political and financial supports that address conflict-related sexual violence, including access to safe and legal abortions.
2. Address public outcries related to sex crimes committed by U.S. military stationed in Okinawa.<sup>4</sup> This is a matter of human dignity and national honor for Japan.
3. Promote universal rights of women based on international standards of gender equality. All countries should adopt the same standards on women's rights. Japan believes this will lead to a fair and just world.
4. Incorporate WPS agenda throughout all phases of foreign aid policy and international development cooperation to countries experiencing direct conflict.
5. Work with North Korea to resolve the issue of the 17+ missing Japanese nationals who were kidnapped by North Korea in the 1970s and 1980s. Returning these individuals to their families is a deeply emotional issue for the Japanese government.<sup>5</sup>

### OPPOSED TO:

There are also items which Japan does **not** want to include in the Regional Action Plan, but may be willing to compromise on if an adequate trade off is met. *Remember that you don't have to offer these right away in a negotiation.* These include:

1. Increase attention to domestic issues within Japan that negatively reflect on WPS progress.<sup>6</sup> WPS is seen primarily as an international initiative for humanitarian assistance.
2. Connecting the "Comfort Women" issue (accusations of WWII sexual slavery committed by the Japanese Imperial Army) with the WPS agenda. Japan already apologized for its role, and extremists exaggerate numbers and refuse to acknowledge that many women were employed as prostitutes, not forced into joining comfort stations.

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<sup>4</sup> Tomita, Tomomi. (2021). "Okinawan women's civic group chronicles sex crimes by U.S. military". [Kyodo News](#)

<sup>5</sup> Siow, Maria. (2023). "Why Japan's bid for talks on North Korean abductions will be 'political suicide' for Kishida" [SCMP](#)

<sup>6</sup> Akibayashi, Kozue. (2020). "How Can the Women, Peace and Security Agenda Be More Relevant in Northeast Asia?". [Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung](#)