



U.S.-JAPAN WORKSHOP ON SUPPORTING DEMOCRACY INTERNATIONALLY

*Presented by Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA and Freedom House
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Respect for political and civil rights in the world has declined for eight consecutive years, due largely to the resurgence of modern authoritarianism, according to the survey conducted by the Freedom House. Undemocratic governments attempt to maintain a veneer of legitimacy while they cripple political opposition, dominate state institutions, suppress civil society, and control independent media. In recognition of this trend, the Sasakawa Peace Foundation, Freedom House and the East West Center convened a range of experts to explore opportunities to strengthen U.S.-Japan cooperation in supporting democracy internationally.

The following is a summary of various views expressed at the workshop and recommendations offered by workshop participants.

The experts at the workshop saw potential for enhanced Japan-U.S. cooperation on democracy support around the world, particularly in Asia. Such cooperation could focus on a range of democratic institutions, processes, and values, including elections, political participation, accountable governance, judiciary, legislative system, protection of human rights, gender equality, civil society, and independent media. Participants identified a need for both the United States and Japan to become more outward looking and to lead efforts to expand support for democracy internationally. Enhanced support for democracy by both countries promotes their shared values, security, and prosperity.

The U.S. and Japanese approaches to democracy support have differed in emphasis. The U.S. tends to directly criticize human rights violations and democratic shortcomings and to publicly call for redress. U.S. democracy support is conducted with a range of partners, including international and local civil society organizations as well as host government institutions. At the same time, U.S. policy is sometimes inconsistent and short-sighted, which hampers U.S. democracy support.

Japan tends to take longer view, to emphasize ownership of other governments, and to encourage their efforts to promote democracy. It uses diplomatic channels and its development aid to persuade other governments to take steps to address human rights abuses and advance political reform. The Japanese government allocates roughly 1.7% of its foreign aid budget directly to democracy assistance, and 93.5% of this budget is directed to development of state institutions. Japan's direct assistance for civil society development is roughly 0.7% of that of the United States.¹

¹ Disbursement data from OECD creditor reporting system (2004-2013)

Japan's democracy support has largely aimed at furthering its strategic interests. However, the Abe administration has placed new emphasis on values-based diplomacy and pledged to enhance support for democracy abroad.

In the view of workshop participants, Japan would benefit from more proactive engagement in democracy support, greater sharing of its experience and expertise in democracy with other countries, and more openness to today's interdependent world (beyond the economic sphere). Efforts are needed domestically to heighten awareness and support among Japanese citizens for democracy assistance internationally. The U.S. would benefit from greater consistency and taking the longer view.

To respond effectively to the global decline in democracy, the U.S. and Japan need to strengthen their cooperation on democracy support, to coordinate their efforts to the extent possible, and to complement each other's efforts when they take different approaches, so that their respective approaches might be mutually reinforcing.

Participants identified four key areas for enhancing U.S.-Japan cooperation: coordination between governments, training programs, civil society, and economic incentives.

Government Coordination

The U.S. and Japan should collaborate more closely with each other; cooperate with other democracies and multilateral organizations as appropriate; and engage with local partners. Initiatives could include:

- US-Japan Congressional Caucus and Congressional Study Group on Japan and the Japan-U.S. Parliamentary Friendship League should engage directly on the issue of democracy support.
- The US-Japan High Level Development Dialogue should add a component on democracy support.
- Aid agencies and relevant government ministries should share expertise on project evaluation indicators and methodologies to improve the impact of democracy support.

Training Programs

Japan and the U.S. should expand their technical assistance programs, enhance the exchange of best practices between their aid agencies, and increase funding for democracy support. Initiatives could include:

- Expand exchange programs for government officials and civil society representatives from partner countries to visit Japan and the U.S., and neighboring democratic countries, for training on democratic institution building.
- Create new opportunities for U.S. and Japanese civil society to exchange staff and thereby sharpen their skills and refine their strategies.
- Increase student exchanges, particularly scholarships for students from non-democratic countries to study in Japan and the U.S.

- Strengthen cooperation between the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers and the U.S. Peace Corps, including exchanges of officials.

Civil Society

A key obstacle to greater cooperation is the weak link between Japanese and U.S. civil society. The contributions of civil society to democracy assistance could be strengthened in the following ways:

- Expand the involvement of civil society representatives in the U.S.-Japan dialogue on development assistance, in particular in the field of democracy support.
- Increase the portion of U.S. and Japanese democracy assistance that is directed to civil society organizations.
- Hold annual meetings between U.S. and Japanese civil society groups to compare strategies, share best practices, and explore opportunities for collaboration on democracy support.
- Integrate Japanese civil society more fully into regional and global forums on democracy support.

Economic Incentives

China's policy of providing substantial aid and investments abroad without conditions does not always give China long-term influence. U.S. and Japan should not try to compete with China in offering aid without paying attention to the promotion of democratization. Instead, their aid should take into account the recipient government's demonstrated commitment to democratic reform. Economic incentives could reinforce democracy support in the following ways:

- Development aid should encourage countries' efforts to respect human rights and to build democracy.
- U.S. and Japanese companies should share experience and expertise on corporate social responsibility, particularly on human rights due diligence.

This workshop provided a productive venue for diplomats, academics, activists, and development practitioners to explore opportunities for Japan and the United States to work more closely together in advancing their common values and supporting the democratic aspirations of citizens around the world. These opportunities merit further consideration. Workshop participants identified needs for next steps, particularly for:

- research to assess the obstacles to civil society participation in democracy support and identify ways to increase civil society participation in designing and providing democracy assistance;
- dialogue to explore possibilities for joint Japan-U.S. pilot projects (which are likely to have significant transaction costs initially but are the most direct way to learn how to collaborate more closely); and
- follow-on discussions among policymakers and practitioners to advance the recommendations made in this workshop.