

**Statement by the former presidents of the Science Council of Japan (SCJ), requesting Prime Minister Ishiba to cancel the submission of the new bill concerning the SCJ**

**(A statement was published on 18 February 2025 by the former presidents of the Science Council of Japan (SCJ), concerning the proposed new bill aimed at the incorporation of the SCJ. The following is its provisional translation.)**

It has been announced that the Japanese government is planning to submit a new “Act on the Science Council of Japan” (provisional) to the parliament during the ongoing session. This new law, which is apparently based on the Final Report of the Committee of Experts on the Future of the Science Council of Japan (20 Dec. 2024) (hereafter “Final Report”), aims at the incorporation of the Science Council of Japan (hereafter “SCJ”) as a “special corporation”. Once it is enacted, the current Act on the Science Council of Japan (1948), which guarantees the independence of the SCJ in pursuing its mission and the autonomy in the selection process of SCJ’s members, will be repealed, and the nature of the SCJ will be totally changed. Although the details of the new law have not yet been published, we can infer its outlines based on the “Final Report” and the Summary of the Act on the Science Council of Japan (circulated in January 2025).

As the former presidents of the SCJ, we have already expressed our view concerning the proposed “reform” of the SCJ in two previous statements, urging then-Prime Minister Kishida to “respect the independence and autonomy of SCJ” (24 Feb. 2023 and 10 Jun. 2024). In spite of that, the new Act on the Science Council of Japan, based on the Final Report, poses a clear threat to the SCJ’s independence and autonomy, both in its activities and the selection process of its members, thereby turning it into an organization which will no longer be regarded by the global scientific community and international scientific academies as a trustworthy national academy, and depriving the SCJ of its ability to fulfill its mission both in the world and in Japanese society itself. We strongly urge Mr. Ishiba, the present Japanese Prime Minister, to demonstrate discretion and moral courage, and to give up the idea of submitting the new bill to the parliament.

Concerning the question of “reform” of the SCJ, an argument which was initiated by the Japanese government immediately after the former Prime Minister Suga’s refusal to appoint six candidates recommended by the SCJ as its new members (October 2020), it has been the position of the SCJ that, if the SCJ is to stay as a national academy and to continue to fulfill its mission as a representative organization of Japanese scientists both

internationally and domestically, the following five points are indispensable. 1) Status as an institution representing the nation academically, 2) the conferment of official nature for that purpose, 3) stable financial basis borne by the national treasury, 4) guarantee of independence from the government in terms of activities, 5) guarantee of autonomy and independence in the selection of its members. (See “Towards a Better Role of the Science Council of Japan”, a document adopted on 22 Apr. 2021). Based on this position, furthermore, the present president of the SCJ declared, in his statement submitted to the aforementioned governmental “Committee of Experts on the Future of the SCJ”, that the following five points, which appear in the course of the committee’s debate concerning the incorporation of the SCJ, are “totally unacceptable”, i.e. 1) stipulating by law the post of “auditor”, who will be appointed by the minister in charge; 2) stipulating by law the establishment of the “evaluation committee”, appointed by the minister in charge; 3) stipulating by law the system of “medium-term objectives and plans”; 4) introducing special measures for the selection of members for the next and the subsequent terms; and 5) stipulating by law the establishment of an “advisory committee for the selection of members”. (See the President’s statement on 30 Jul. 2024). We believe that these principles, which have been declared by the SCJ to confirm its independence and autonomy, are quite reasonable, consistent with the internationally accepted and time-honored norms for scientific organizations, and are able to gain the support of global scientific community.

According to the Final Report and the summary of the proposed bill, however, the new systems and committees, upon which the SCJ has expressed serious concerns, are to be stipulated by law, under the pretext that these are necessary for the “governance” of the new corporation. There is a strong fear that the establishment of different committees (some are composed of the members outside the SCJ, the others nominated by the prime minister) and new posts (such as the auditor appointed by the prime minister) will lead to the loss of autonomy of the SCJ and disrupt its activities. As for introducing the post of the auditor and evaluation committee, especially, since these are selected and appointed by the prime minister, it is highly possible that this will lead to the governmental control over the activities of the SCJ and, hence, the loss of its independence. Concerning the evaluation committee, while its nature is not fully explained in the Final Report, the summary of the bill states explicitly that it is to be “located within the Cabinet Office”, making it clear that a governmental organization will evaluate the SCJ’s activities. Such a relationship between the national academy and the government will cause a decline in the prestige of the SCJ as an academy and the loss of faith in the Japanese government for its lack of vision, both internationally and

domestically.

As the Committee of Experts on the Future of the Science Council of Japan admitted, the most decisive reason for the incorporation of the SCJ (by which it will be changed from a state institution to a special corporation) is to create a situation in which the prime minister will no longer appoint the SCJ's members. This is because, as has been mentioned before, Prime Minister Suga failed, in 2020, to appoint the six candidates recommended by the SCJ as its new members, in defiance of the present Act on the SCJ, distorting the interpretation of its articles. Although the idea of incorporation dates back to 2005, when, on the occasion of the amendment of the Act on the SCJ, the possibility was first mentioned and was proposed to be examined within the next ten years, the then-established "Committee of Experts for Contemplating on the New Prospects of the Science Council of Japan", after reviewing the SCJ's activities, came to the conclusion in 2015 that the "current system, wherein the SCJ is defined as a state institution and at the same time is legally guaranteed its independence and endowed with powers to make recommendations to the government, is suitable for fulfilling its expected mission, and it is difficult to find any positive reason for changing it." (See "On the future prospects of the Science Council of Japan", 20 Mar. 2015).

A careful examination of the course of events reveals, therefore, that the ongoing project of incorporation presented in the Final Report is motivated by a desire to conceal the illegality of Prime Minister Suga's refusal to appoint the candidates recommended by the SCJ, a totally inexplicable action, and to use it, furthermore, as a pretext for justifying the incorporation of SCJ. Thus, it is obvious that the new bill is only aimed at contriving a scheme for transforming the SCJ into a special corporation, concentrating on the question of how to exercise governmental control over a corporation which is financed by the state ("either wholly or partially", according to the summary of the bill) and lacks any view for enhancing the SCJ's ability to fulfill its mission.

Each national academy worldwide, whether in the UK, the US, France, or Germany, has its own history, tradition, and specific character based on the course of development it followed. Compared with its counterparts in Europe and the US, the 75-year history of the SCJ is relatively short. Still, having been established after the Second World War based on the belief in the role of science in rebuilding Japan, the SCJ has achieved a unique course of development, continuously reforming itself in response to support and criticism on the part of Japanese civil society, and expanding its activities. Its legal basis, the current Act on the Science Council of Japan (1948), declares in its preamble that the

SCJ was established based on the “consensus of the entire scientific community, with the missions of contributing to the peaceful revitalization of Japan, the welfare of human society, and to academic progress, in coordination with global academic communities”.

In order to further strengthen the SCJ’s role in addressing urgent global challenges and providing scientific advice to society and the government in an effective and suitable manner, its function should be more empowered through necessary reforms. The proposed incorporation, which would transform the SCJ into a special corporation controlled by the government both in its administration and its activities in every possible way, is counterproductive for the development of the SCJ based on its unique tradition, would weaken its function as a national academy which has been offering scientific advice both to society and the government for more than 75 years, and could mark the “beginning of the end” of science in Japan. The reform of the SCJ, aimed at solving different issues of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, should be carried out under the initiative of the SCJ itself, supported by the whole community of Japanese scientists and the scientific academies worldwide, and through the process of fair and open consultation involving the representatives of civil society, industries, and government as well, with the aim of reconfirming the mission of the SCJ and locating it within the context of science policy of Japan as a whole. We urge, once again, Mr. Ishiba to make a courageous decision and take up this task.

18 February 2025

Signed by:

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N.B. The original text of the statement was issued in Japanese. This is a provisional translation prepared by Yoshiko KURITA and Mitsunori TARAO.