

【Statement by Pugwash Japan Opposing the New Bill on the Science Council of Japan】

Statement against the attempt to turn the Science Council of Japan into a special corporation: Stop the backlash against peace. Let us strengthen our efforts to abolish war and eliminate nuclear weapons.

22 February 2025

The Japanese government has announced its intention to submit a new bill to the current Diet session that will transform the Science Council of Japan (SCJ) into a special corporation established and controlled by the government. Once enacted, this will completely change the nature of the SCJ, which, ever since its establishment under the current Act on the Science Council of Japan (1948), based on the collective will of the scientists of Japan, has been fulfilling its unique mission for the past 75 years, as a state institution, still providing scientific advice to the government, industry and society at large, completely independently, from a purely academic standpoint.

To address this critical situation, six former presidents of the SCJ issued a statement on 18th February urging Prime Minister Ishiba to withdraw the bill, stating that this new bill “poses a clear threat to the independence and autonomy of the SCJ”, will prevent the SCJ from fulfilling its mission as a scientific academy in Japanese society, and will result in the loss of its international prestige as well. A considerable number of academic societies and institutions of civil society have also expressed their opposition to the new bill, criticizing its dangerous nature. An online petition campaign against the bill has also been launched and is spreading rapidly with the support of many citizens.

In retrospect, the new bill has its origin in the incident in October 2020, when Prime Minister Suga (then Prime Minister of Japanese) refused to appoint the six candidates recommended by the SCJ as its members. While this refusal, which was obviously unlawful and unjustified, was widely criticized by the Japanese public, the government, for its part, claimed that it was the SCJ which needed to be “reformed,” and began its plan to incorporate the SCJ, arguing that, if the SCJ were to become a special corporation, it would no longer be necessary for its members to be appointed by the prime minister. Since then, the government has proceeded with this plan quite arbitrarily, despite the serious concerns repeatedly expressed by the SCJ. Behind the government’s insistence on “reforming” the SCJ is a political motive, i.e., its desire to mobilize the positive cooperation of Japanese scientists in the large-scale militarization program being promoted by the current government. If the SCJ remains an independent and autonomous scientific academy, it can be an obstacle to this militarization scheme,

because the SCJ, learning a lesson from the negative historical experience of the prewar Japan, has repeatedly declared, since its inauguration, its determination not to participate in scientific research for military purposes. Most recently, in 2017, it issued, a statement on the “Project for the Promotion of Security Technologies” sponsored by the Ministry of Defense, warning the Japanese scientific community against this project from the perspective of academic freedom.

Pugwash Japan is a national group that is a part of the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, an international movement initiated by a group of scientists in the spirit of the Russell-Einstein Manifesto (1955), which, recognizing the imminent danger of the destruction of mankind by nuclear war, called for the abolition of nuclear weapons and of war itself, stressed the importance of settling international disputes by peaceful means. (Among the 11 signatories of the Russell-Einstein Manifesto was Hideki YUKAWA, a Nobel Prize Japanese scientist). It is our great pleasure that the *Nihon Hidankyo* (a grassroots movement of atomic bomb survivors from Hiroshima and Nagasaki) was awarded the 2024 Nobel Peace Prize, and we see it as an encouragement on the part of international civil society for the tireless efforts of Japanese citizens who have been working for the elimination of nuclear weapons and, to this end, urging the Japanese government to ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons as soon as possible. It is noteworthy that Mr. Frydnes, the Chair of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, in his speech awarding the Peace Prize to the *Hidankyo*, quoted the famous phrase from the Russell-Einstein Manifesto: "We appeal, as human beings, to human beings: Remember your humanity, and forget the rest," emphasizing the importance of nuclear abolition as a cause for all of humanity.

Towards the end of the same speech, the Chairperson Frydnes addressed the *Hibakusha*, calling them a light in the darkest night, the “light the world needs”. This reminds us of the fact, on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the end of the World War II and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, that the Science Council of Japan has also been fulfilling the mission of “contributing to the peaceful revitalization of Japan, the welfare of human society, and scientific progress, in coordination with the global academic communities” since its establishment (The Preamble of the Act of the Science Council of Japan). We believe that the SCJ, which is based on the current Act of the CSJ (1948) and whose activities are carried out in accordance with it, is also the “light” much needed by Japanese civil society, which is aspiring and striving for the abolition of war and nuclear weapons.

We, the Pugwash Japan, express our strong opposition to the new bill being prepared

by the government, which aims to completely change the nature of the SCJ.

Pugwash Japan (The Executive Committee)