

Video Message from President Tanigaki of
the National Federation of Volunteer Probation Officers

I am Sadakazu Tanigaki, the President of the National Federation of Volunteer Probation Officers.

I would like to first extend a very warm welcome to all overseas participants of the World Congress for Community Volunteers Supporting Offender Reintegration.

Furthermore, I would like to take this opportunity to offer my sincere gratitude to all Japanese volunteers for their tremendous support for offender rehabilitation.

On behalf of the National Federation of Volunteer Probation Officers, I would like to deliver a video message.

This World Congress was scheduled to invite many people from all over the world to my hometown, Kyoto, on April 21 last year.

Unfortunately, due to the impact of Covid-19, the World Congress is held online today.

I regret that most of the participants cannot experience the beauty of spring in Kyoto, but the fact that we are able to hold the World Congress without losing out to Covid-19 makes me confident that it will further strengthen the "bonds" among community volunteers from all over the world.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude and respect to all those who contributed to the realization of this World Congress.

Thinking back to 2014, the first Asia Volunteer Probation Officers Meeting was held in Tokyo. I was then the Minister of Justice, and I delivered a welcome address at the Meeting.

The Meeting was the first international conference ever in which volunteer probation officers (VPOs) mainly from Asian countries

gathered. Kenyan VPOs also attended the Meeting, and I remember I was deeply impressed by the fact that the passion of Hogoshi (Japan's VPOs) has reached Africa.

The discussions at the Meeting were very enthusiastic, and the Tokyo Declaration was proudly read with the dream of having more people in the world learn about the role of VPOs in criminal justice policy and introducing and developing a VPO system in each country.

I am truly impressed that the noble ideals of the Tokyo Declaration have led to today's World Congress, and that they have given us the opportunity to think about community volunteer system together with a wider scope.

During my political career, I served as the president of my political party, the Minister of Justice, and in other important leadership positions. I have always valued the bonds both between people and between people and

communities.

Since I became physically disabled due to an accident, I have keenly understand the importance of support from others around me. I also feel a sense of "bond" here.

Hogoshi (Japan's VPOs) patiently support ex-offenders who are struggling to reflect on their behavior, move away from crime and delinquency, and make a fresh start in life.

This is a "bond" of trust with persons who have committed crime.

In addition, ex-offenders need a local community which accepts them to be reintegrated into society, and hogoshi have a role to play in creating a bridge and a new "bond" between the two.

The community where ex-offenders can be warmly welcomed is a place where people can take on challenges again through "bonds" of

warm support with others. For this reason, hogoshi are constantly engaged in their activities.

This is because they know that such activities will maintain the safety and security of all the people in the community.

In recent years, however, it seems like a global trend that these kinds of communities have been shrinking and have become increasingly fragmented, and that people are growing apart.

I feel that this Covid-19 crisis poses a risk of spurring this tendency.

Therefore, the most important thing is to carefully reformulate the bonds between people who support each other. Whatever the difficulties they face in each country or region, hogoshi who take the lead in putting these into practice, are an essential part of our society.

Taking this World Congress as an opportunity, a society that values "bonds" between people,

rather than excluding ex-offenders from society, is a "society in which no one is left behind," as the SDGs call for. So why don't we, the community volunteers gathered here today, take the lead in realizing this society?

In closing, I wish you all a successful World Congress and your continued success in building safe and secure societies in your countries and regions.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.