

Shadow Report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

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About Us: We are an organization to promote family values. Family values are being lost quickly and accordingly the family bond and unity are breaking down quickly. Our purpose is to try to keep and promote family values so that the family as the basic unit in society can prosper.

Objection to dual surname system after marriage

In reference to item 13(a) of the concluding observation (CEDAW/C/JPN/CO/7-8) and item 4 of the list of issues (CEDAW/C/JPN/QPR/9), please note that we strongly object to a dual surname system after marriage.

Dual surname supporters complain that Japan is the only country in the world which does not allow dual surname after marriage; however, each country has its unique way of choosing a surname at marriage based on its history and culture. For example, Greece and Italy requires all women to keep their maiden names once married. In Germany, a woman may adopt her husband`s surname or a man may adopt his wife`s surname. If a man and woman both decide to keep and use their birth names after the wedding, they shall declare one of those names the “family name.” In Spanish speaking countries, it is customary for women to keep their names which are already made up of two surnames. Adopting the husband`s surname remains common practice in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, etc. Thus, there is nothing wrong for Japan to adopt one family name system based on our customs and culture.

Dual surname supporters also state that the current Japanese system is not gender equal since the majority of women take husband`s surname at marriage. However, the system of Japan is gender neutral since both women and men have equal right to keep their former names. The majority of women simply choose their husband`s surname since they want to do so, not because they are forced to do so. Historically, if the woman is the only child to succeed the family, her family normally adopt her husband into their family so that the family line continues. This is how we have kept the family line intact for so many years. The Japanese system is a matter of how to keep the family line intact, not a matter of gender equality.

Another complaint of supporters is that changing surnames is inconvenient for many women who have an established career before the marriage. In order to solve this inconvenience, the government of Japan started a system to indicate one`s maiden names as common names in paperwork such as my-number card, driver`s license, passport, etc. Lately, many companies accept the use of a maiden name as a common name.

These dual surname supporters are concerned so much about the gender equality and the woman`s right; however, they are not considering the wellbeing of children. If parents have two surnames and they cannot agree on their children`s surname, who is going to decide? The family court? The birth of a child will easily become a battle between parents over the child`s

surname, not the happy occasion to celebrate. How do children react to the fact that their parents have different names and how do their friends react to that? Isn't there a possibility for the child to become the target of ridicule since the distinction between dual surname couples and cohabiting couples is not easy on the surface. According to a survey conducted by NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) in 2022, only 7% of middle and high school children support the use of dual surnames. Obviously, the majority of children know what is best for them.

Also, it is interesting that according to the public opinion collected by the Ministry of Law in 2022, while only 25% of married couples support dual surnames, almost 60% of cohabiting couples support dual surnames. This is a clear indication that the characteristics of dual surname couples may be more alike to cohabiting couples than married couples. Research after research indicates that children brought up by cohabiting couples do not fare as well as married couples because cohabiting unions are much less stable and less likely to devote their financial resources to childrearing, etc. We do not need any experiment of a dual surname system when the system may be detrimental to children.

Another issue concerns the Japanese family registration system. Many countries register citizens individually, but in Japan instead of the individual, the family unit is registered. It serves as a certificate of citizenship and fills the function of birth certificate, death certificate, marriage license, etc. However, if a dual surname system is adopted, one's surname no longer functions as a family name but simply functions as an individual name. If the family registration system does not work to record a family's name, it may eventually lose its function and be abolished. Once the system is abolished, the functions the system covers will also be gone. It will cause much confusion and headaches for cities and local offices, just to name a few.

The family is the basic unit in a community and the nation, and thus keeping the family unity intact is very important for the prosperity of the community and the nation. Dual surname by husband and wife will certainly break down the family bond and unity and eventually lead us to the destruction of the family system per se. We strongly object the introduction of a dual surname system in Japan, which may lead the country into chaos.