

Statement

Dialogue, Not Explanation

Establish an Open Forum for Consultations,

Not Hasty Revision of the Law



April 18, 2023

Science Council of Japan

The original text is written in Japanese. This is a provisional English translation.

This statement was decided at the 187th General Assembly of the Science Council of Japan.

The preamble to the Act on the Science Council of Japan stipulates that the Science Council of Japan, standing upon the assurance that science is the foundation of a cultured nation, and under the consensus of the entire scientific community, with the missions of contributing to the peaceful revitalization of our country, the welfare of human society, and to academic progress, in coordination with the global academic community, is hereby established by this Act.

This is the founding spirit of the Science Council of Japan, which was established in 1949.

The activities of the Science Council of Japan during its 25th term (three years from October 2020) began with efforts to resolve an issue of the unreasonable postponement of appointments by the then Prime Minister. It has to be said that the postponement by the Government lacked transparency and failed to fulfill minimum accountability in that the reasons for postponement were not disclosed. It has yet to be resolved even to this day. Under these circumstances, the Science Council of Japan has begun to examine its own reforms in order to redefine the role of the Academy in the 21st century, a time of dramatically accelerating global change.

In the process, the Science Council of Japan has proposed five essential requirements for the Academy, (i) its status as an institution representing the academic community of the country, (ii) granting an official qualification for such status, (iii) a stable financial foundation provided by government expenditure, (iv) independence in its activities from the government, and (v) autonomy and independence in the selection of its membership.

After conducting a comprehensive review of the role that the Academy must play in the future, as well as reform measures under the current system, the Science Council of Japan released "Towards Better Functioning of the Science Council of Japan," in April 2021. We are now steadily implementing the reform measures described herein, and we have initiated dialogue with the Minister of State for Science and Technology Policy.

However, without fulfilling the initial promise to issue a policy that expressed the government's position, the Minister in charge of the Science Council of Japan was replaced in August 2022. Thereafter, even under the new Minister in charge of the Science Council of Japan, government policy was not disclosed. There still remained no substantive dialogue. Then, in December 2022, the government suddenly and unilaterally announced their policy of amending the Act on the Science Council of Japan.

We have issued a Statement that the abrupt announcement of this government policy, without any dialogue, and immediate submission of a bill to amend the Act to the ordinary session of the National Diet to open in January, is an inadequate approach. In accordance with our report, we have insisted that an open forum for consultations, with a wide range of stakeholders involved in academia, be held to discuss reform measures that are truly necessary for the future development of academia in Japan. However, this proposal has not been taken seriously by the government. We have received only one-sided "explanations" from the Cabinet Office regarding the proposed amendments to the Act, scheduled to be submitted to the ordinary Diet session. We are not asking for a "careful explanation" of the situation of the proposed law revision, but rather a "sincere dialogue" on how the Science Council of Japan can better fulfill its role.

Our concern is the procedural legitimacy of the proposed amendments to the Act on the

Science Council of Japan, which was established "with the consensus of entire scientific community" as stated in the preamble of the Act, which the Cabinet Office is formulating on its own without any serious dialogue with the stakeholder. We are concerned, also, that the establishment of the selection advisory committee, the formulation of a medium-term operational plan, and the follow-up policy included in the proposed legal amendment, which seems to deny the existence of the Science Council of Japan itself, may impair the independence of the Science Council of Japan.*1*2 In this regard, researchers and academic organizations in Japan and abroad share the concern raised by the Science Council of Japan.*3

Since the establishment of academies in European countries in the 17th century, there has been a growing awareness of the importance of preventing intervention by those in power or by religion, in order to ensure the sound development of academia. The consideration at that time was that independent and autonomous academic development, free from government and other forms of power, would enrich our understanding of society and the world through the diverse perspectives provided by academic thought, thereby contributing to the well-being of humankind. Academia produces legitimate views based on logic and judgment developed under a time frame unique to academia. The equipping of society with an academia that is characterized by independent and autonomous endeavor speaks to the wisdom of civilization. Hence, the concern arises that Japan's international reputation and trust may be damaged because of this legal amendment by the Japanese government. Domestically, the relationship of trust between the government and academia may be eroded, leading to a decline in research capacity, further undermining the role of academia which is to contribute to society.

When establishing an academy, it is necessary to fulfill the five requirements mentioned above, taking into account the history, society, and legal system of each country; therefore, the form of the academies in each country is realized in different ways. With this in mind, we have released a report on a "better" academy in Japan and are working to realize it. Accordingly, we are calling upon the government to suspend submission of the bill to amend the Act and to establish an open forum for consultations with the participation of a wide range of stakeholders to conduct a comprehensive and fundamental review the entire academic system in Japan, including the Science Council of Japan. This is because we believe that this amendment of the Act should not mark "the beginning of the end of academia in Japan."

*1 Available only in Japanese.

<https://www.scj.go.jp/ja/info/kohyo/pdf/kohyo-25-s186-setumei.pdf>

*2 Available only in Japanese. <https://www.scj.go.jp/ja/info/kohyo/pdf/339-kenen.pdf>

*3 Refer to the related documents in English. <https://www.scj.go.jp/en/index.html>