

## **Statement**

**Concern about the Government Decision "Reform of the  
SCJ to establish a Corporation Independent from the  
Government of Japan (December 22, 2023)"**

**-The SCJ as a National Academy Contributing to the  
Nation and the World -**



**April 23,2024**

**Science Council of Japan**

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

This statement was decided at the 191<sup>st</sup> General Assembly of the Science Council of Japan.

In society today, humanity faces numerous severe crises, including climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, and armed conflicts. The role of academia in addressing these challenges is becoming increasingly significant. In this context, the Science Council of Japan (hereinafter referred to as the "SCJ") published the document, "Towards a Better Role of the Science Council of Japan" (hereinafter referred to as "Better Role") on April 22, 2021. The SCJ has been working diligently to respond to various social demands more appropriately than ever before.

In response, the government released on December 22, 2023 "Reform of the SCJ to Establish a Corporation Independent from the Government of Japan" (hereinafter referred to as the "Decision by the Minister of State for Special Missions"). To further examine this decision, the government established two working groups (hereinafter referred to as "Examination WGs") under the Experts' Panel on the Reform of the Science Council of Japan (decided by the Minister of State for Special Missions on August 29, 2023, hereinafter referred to as the "Experts' Panel"): the 'Working Group on Organization and Institution,' and the 'Working Group on Member Selection,' etc. The first meeting of the Working Group on Organization and Institution was held on April 15, 2024.

The SCJ adheres to a belief that any reform must truly contribute to the nation and the world through the development of academia and its outcomes. Therefore, it is necessary to continue to deepen discussions from this perspective within the framework of the Examination WGs. The SCJ has decided to proactively participate in these discussions to ensure that the examinations are conducted in a manner that allows the SCJ to fully meet the social expectations of its role in society.

To fulfill its role, therefore, the SCJ needs the institutional guarantee of the five conditions outlined in "Better Role," regardless of its organizational form. These five conditions are internationally recognized as essential for a national academy. The SCJ is currently furnished with these five conditions. Establishing a corporation independent from the government does not necessarily imply the enhancement of autonomy and independence outlined in these five conditions. Thus, at the 190th General Assembly held on December 9, 2023, the SCJ published the statement "Basic Ideas for Better Role of the Science Council of Japan - Towards Discussions for Flexible Development Utilizing Unconventional Thinking," and highlighted key concerns regarding its reform to establish a new institution.

However, the subsequent 'Decision' by the Minister of State for Special Missions has not alleviated the concerns expressed at the aforementioned statement, and the issues highlighted at the 191st General Assembly have still been evident. Therefore,

the SCJ reiterates that the following points must be met in the government's examinations for details in the future.

Firstly, reforms must lead to improved functioning of the SCJ. This includes securing SCJ's substantial functions such as its advisory role to the government as well as ensuring a stable and sufficient financial base primarily funded by the national budget. The Interim Report of the Experts' Panel (December 21, 2023, hereinafter referred to as the "Interim Report") also confirms the importance of continued financial support by the government, taking into account the significance and nature of national academies.

Secondly, it is crucial to ensure autonomy and independence from the government concerning in organizational and institutional matters. The Interim Report also emphasizes that the SCJ must sometimes adopt a critical stance vis-à-vis-government policies. The guarantee of independence from the government is essential in order to provide the judicious academic and scientific advice needed to address issues effectively. The Interim Report strongly demands that the government ensure that, even in the event of establishing a new institution, it is imperative that autonomy and independence are ensured to a greater extent than they are now. Additionally, in order to ensure that the activities of the SCJ retain their speed and flexibility, governance that reflects the nature of academia is important. Crucial also is the maintenance of a governance system that is not overly burdensome while upholding a high level of transparency, aligned with the purpose, function, and size of the SCJ.

Thirdly, regarding membership selection, in order to select excellent scientists with a high level of expertise, the co-optation method and the election of the President by its Council Members are indispensable. At the previous membership selection, reforms needed, such as improving the transparency of the selection process, were carried out voluntarily. These reforms indubitably resulted in significant improvements. Membership selections in the future should also be conducted autonomously and independently by the SCJ. The method of selection should be determined by the SCJ itself.

Academia is a fundamental basis for the development of nations and humanity. In major advanced countries, national academies representing each country, including the SCJ in Japan, have historically identified problems and proposed solutions from a scientific perspective. They have maintained, at the same time, independence from the governments of the time as well as independence from political, social, and religious powers. National academies of major countries are now paying close attention, and with concern, to the reform developments of the SCJ.

In upcoming examinations, the Interim Report and the Decision by the Minister of State for Special Missions both specify that concrete examination should proceed while listening to the opinions of the SCJ. The SCJ, in the light of its legacy, calls for continuing and constructive consultations with the government while proactively engaging in dialogue with society. Such consultation and dialogue is a sine qua non in order for the SCJ to fulfill effectively and uninterruptedly the social expectations of its role throughout the SCJ's 75-year history.