G8 Leaders Welcome Framework for Action on Global Health

“Takemi Working Group’s” Presence Felt

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Sankei Shimbun, July 9, 2008 (Unofficial Translation)

In their discussions about Development and Africa, the leaders of G8 countries on July 8 welcomed the report of the G8 Health Experts Group, entitled “Toyako Framework for Action on Global Health.” The framework proposed in the report touches on such challenges as health system strengthening, maternal and child health, and efforts to fight the spread of communicable diseases. The leaders also agreed to create a mechanism for monitoring progress on meeting existing G8 commitments.

Moreover, the G8 leaders reiterated the commitment they made at last year’s summit in Heiligendamm to provide US$60 billion over the coming years to fight communicable diseases such as AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria and to strengthen health systems in developing countries, and they agreed to specify a five-year timeframe for that commitment. The G8 countries are currently providing US$15 billion per year, so in order to ensure that they do not end up reducing aid with US$60 billion over five years, they agreed that some countries would provide more support for safe water so that their overall support for health system strengthening will actually exceed US$60 billion.

Based on the Framework for Action, the G8 leaders’ statement addresses communicable diseases, maternal and child health, and health workforces and other issues related to health system strengthening. They agreed to 1) work toward increasing the number of health workers to the WHO-supported target of 2.3 health workers per 1,000 people; 2) achieve the goal of universal access to HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and treatment by 2010; and 3) provide 100 million long-lasting insecticide-treated bed nets to combat malaria by the end of 2010.

Japan has been praised for making communicable diseases a priority of the summit agenda eight years ago at the Kyushu-Okinawa Summit. Japan also draws on its own
experience in public health, having successfully improved maternal and child health in the years following World War Two, so health is a field to which Japan should make international contributions.

Furthermore, this year marks the halfway point for achievement of the millennium development goals (MDGs), which were agreed to at the United Nations in 2000. Of the eight MDGs, three (reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, and fighting communicable diseases) relate to health, which is why Japan chose to emphasize global health at this year’s summit.

There were also some challenges that are difficult to deal with. The G8 countries have already made various commitments to global health, and one could say that rather than making new commitments, now is the time to fulfill existing commitments.

One group that has been the focus of attention in the health discussions surrounding the G8 Summit is a group of health experts known as the Takemi Working Group. Keizo Takemi, former senior vice minister for health, labor, and welfare, leads the group, which consists of representatives from each of the government ministries working on the summit, experts in medicine and public health, and leaders of NGOs that work in developing countries. This group, bringing together opinions from a wide range of experts, has produced a report on their work.

It seems that this kind of group that brings together experts’ knowledge with political purposes to offer prescriptions for dealing with global challenges is a tool that will continue to be used in future summits.