

Roundtable on Japanese-Language Education Releases Proposal

On February 28, 2007, a roundtable on Japanese-language education convened by the Japan Foundation submitted to Minister for Foreign Affairs Taro Aso a proposal for a broad-based consortium to promote Japanese-language education worldwide. In the proposal, the roundtable calls for setting international standards for Japanese-language education, and for the effective implementation of initiatives toward that end, it urges the need to create a consortium consisting of experts and concerns from the national and local governments, the business sector, and academia.

Suggested initiatives include training teachers and further developing and improving teaching materials and methods. As the Japanese-Language Proficiency Test is currently held at a much lower frequency and smaller scale than the TOEFL and TOEIC tests of English proficiency, moreover, it is advised that Japanese-language testing centers be established to expand overseas implementation. Also, with an eye to increasing the number of Japanese-language learners outside Japan to three million by 2010, the group suggests setting up overseas bases that can serve as practical models for Japanese-language education.

The number of learners of Japanese has steadily risen over the past decades, reaching 2.35 million in 2003. A recent resolution on global strategy by the Japanese government's Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy calls for efforts to increase this figure to a target of three million by 2010. The framework for launching such efforts is still in need of strengthening, however, and a consortium that cuts across industry, government, and academia as proposed by the roundtable can be expected to generate a concerted drive for vigorously promoting the study of Japanese as a foreign language.

Since May 2006, the roundtable on Japanese-language education has held several meetings of leading members of various fields, including Japanese-language education, business, the media, and academia. On February 28, 2007, Roundtable Chair Osamu Mizutani, president of the Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, submitted a proposal titled "Ima koso, sekai ni hirakareta Nihongo o" [Bringing the Japanese Language to the World] to the foreign minister.

For details see: <http://www.jpf.go.jp/e/japan/news/0703/proposal.pdf>

Inquiries should be directed to:

Takashi Ishida, Director of the Planning and Coordination Division, Japanese-Language Department, The Japan Foundation

E-mail: Takashi_Ishida@jpf.go.jp Tel.: 03-5562-3525 Fax: 03-5562-349