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Upon Celebrating Constitution Memorial Day

OTANI Naoto  
Chief Justice of the Supreme Court

This year, we celebrate the 74th anniversary since the Constitution of Japan came into effect.

Even since this year began, the global pandemic of COVID-19 is still ongoing and seriously affecting people's lives. Strenuous efforts are being made to prevent the spread of infection while continuing social and economic activities, and we at courts have also been working together to address this situation, giving top priority to achieving the requirement of infection control in a manner that is well-balanced with the role of the judiciary, which is vested with the mission of dispute resolution. At present, we conduct operations in line with the policy of continuing court proceedings as stably as possible, while thoroughly taking infection control measures based on expert advice and making consideration and arrangements so as to operate proceedings depending on the actual conditions of the respective regions. In operating the *Saiban-in* system, which will soon mark the 12th anniversary since its introduction, we also exercise extreme caution for securing an environment where citizens selected as *Saiban-in* can participate in proceedings safely without concerns. This system has been operated smoothly, supported by public understanding and cooperation. Needless to say, it is important to promote these measures while gaining the understanding of the local communities concerned. We will continue to provide information regarding court practice to the public as necessary.

Various restrictions imposed on social and economic activities for the purpose of preventing the spread of infection have seriously affected people's lives, and conflicts that people feel under such circumstances may become visible in the form of legal disputes in the future. In particular, with regard to family-related cases, it has been pointed out that cases that are difficult to solve are increasing along with the diversification of notions of what a family should be as well as the changes in society. It is also necessary to give due consideration to the impact of the current situation on family affairs. With this in mind, we will carry out institutional development as necessary to appropriately deal with new issues that will be brought to court.

The experience of the current pandemic has made people recognize the utility of information and telecommunications technology and further accelerated the use of information technology in society. The judiciary field is no exception to this movement. In the area of court proceedings for civil cases where discussion of the introduction of information technology has been initiated ahead of other areas, the practice of conducting proceedings to arrange issues and evidence with the use of IT tools such as a web-conferencing system was introduced at district courts nationwide in December last year. Seeing that the number of cases handled with this system is increasing constantly, I feel that the new practice has gradually become common in this area. With the process of considering amendments to the Code of Civil Procedure and other relevant statutes ongoing, we will deepen discussions from the perspective of what we should do to make more effective use of information technology in order to meet users' needs, while reviewing our conventional practice in operating court proceedings to identify what should be improved. In the area of criminal proceedings as well, the discussion on measures to be taken to introduce information technology both in investigations and trials was initiated in March this year. The introduction of information technology in court proceedings is a task that the entire court, regardless of area, must consider for the future.

Up until today, courts have endeavored to contribute to the development of economy and stabilization of society by properly exercising the judicial power vested therein under the Constitution of Japan to solve disputes arising in society. This year marks the 20th anniversary since the Justice System Reform Council published its final recommendations. We must continue discussions by fully taking advantage of the discussions accumulated through the reforms of the justice system and having a broad perspective on whether the judiciary of Japan is playing its role properly. Upon celebrating this year's Constitution Memorial Day, I give due consideration once again to the weight of the mission of courts to solidify the rule of law under the Constitution of Japan, and recognize anew our responsibility to do our utmost to meet citizens' expectations for courts.