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Upon Celebrating Constitution Memorial Day

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This year, we celebrate the 75th anniversary since the Constitution of Japan came into effect. This year is also the 50th anniversary year since Okinawa's reversion to Japan. Upon this milestone year, we who engage in the judiciary renew our resolution to appropriately respond to the changes of the times and make consistent efforts to gain further confidence from the public.

More than two years have passed since our everyday life changed drastically due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. It seems that it will take some more time to see the end of the pandemic, but I think that we are gradually returning to our normal lives as a result of the efforts of the many people involved in infection control and the cooperation of citizens. At courts, we have also endeavored to take thorough infection control measures based on expert knowledge, and have been able to maintain operations without scaling them down even under the two occasions of declarations of a state of emergency issued last year. We will continue to give due consideration in operating court proceedings and make operational improvements meticulously depending on the actual conditions of the respective regions, while reviewing our infection control measures in a timely manner in light of the changes in the infection status and newly accumulated knowledge. We ask once again for your cooperation with our operation of court proceedings.

The movement toward digitalization in every area of society is accelerating, and the pandemic may be one of the factors that has driven this trend. At courts, as well, efforts have been made to digitalize various proceedings. In the field of civil litigation proceedings, for which digitalization is most advanced, the use of a web-conferencing system is becoming established in proceedings to arrange issues and evidence. In April this year, a new system to allow the submission of documents such as briefs and copies of evidence in digital format was put into operation at some courts. Legislative measures necessary to ensure online proceedings from the filing of an action through to the rendition of a judgment are also currently under deliberation at the Diet. At family courts, the use of the web-conferencing system in proceedings for conciliation of domestic relations started on a trial basis in December last year. In the area of criminal proceedings, a report of discussion results was compiled in March this year regarding measures to be taken to introduce digital technology both in criminal investigations and trials. Digitalization will lead to a significant change in the entirety of courts and court proceedings in the future. We, at courts, must cope with this issue, considering what courts should be like in the future digital society, in line with the lifestyles of citizens and the needs of court users.

The *Saiban-in* system has been operated generally smoothly, and there has been no great disruption in proceedings operated under the *Saiban-in* system amid the spread of the infection. I would like to express once again my respect for your understanding of and cooperation in this system. From 2023, people aged 18 and 19 will join this system and serve as *Saiban-in*. In order to encourage young people to actively participate in this system, we will strive to disseminate information in consideration of the actual situation of legal education of young people and reflect their opinions in improving the operation of the system. We must carefully listen to the frank opinions of a wide range of people serving as *Saiban-in* and make consistent efforts in reviewing the practice sincerely with an awareness of the ideal

operation of proceedings, aiming to have the *Saiban-in* system take root further deeply in society.

The conciliation system, which has played a role as a means of dispute resolution that is near at hand for citizens, marks its 100th anniversary this year. For as long as about a century, conciliation proceedings have functioned as one of the main pillars under the legal dispute resolution system, along with litigation proceedings, while going through several system revisions and operational changes in response to the social and economic situations of the times. We will continue to endeavor to improve the operation of the conciliation system so that it will meet the expectations and gain a high degree of trust from citizens by bringing about solutions to disputes that are suitable to the needs of future users and highly acceptable to them.

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. As the social structure is changing at an accelerated pace in Japan, and looking at the world, events that could shake the conventional international order are taking place, it is now difficult to forecast how the international situation surrounding Japan will change in the future. Even in this time of great changes, the role that courts should play is to give remedy for citizens' rights, realize the "rule of law" through proper and prompt dispute resolution by law, and thereby contribute to the stabilization of society.

Upon celebrating this year's Constitution Memorial Day, I give due consideration to the importance of the principle of "rule of law" and the weight of the mission that courts are expected to play, and dedicate my best efforts to ensuring that the judiciary will fully play its

role in the new era.