

June 11, 2025

Meeting of Presidents of High Courts and Chief Judges of District Courts and
Family Courts

Address by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court

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Activities in various socioeconomic areas, spurred by advances in science and technology in recent years, are progressing at a truly rapid pace, and demographic changes, such as the declining birthrate and aging population, as well as the resulting changes in socioeconomic structures, are accelerating at an increasing rate. Under these circumstances, the values and behavioral patterns of the public are becoming more diverse than ever and the nature of economic activities is changing at a dizzying pace. The legal disputes that arise from these changes are becoming more diverse and complex, and conflicts of opinion and interest are intensifying, making disputes increasingly difficult to resolve. The courts' mission, which is to appropriately and promptly resolve such disputes, remains consistently unchanged from the past to the future. For the judicial system to continue to be trusted by the public and remain a foundation supporting the rule of law amidst these substantial and unpredictable environmental changes, it is of course necessary that we respond to various issues in the operations of court proceedings while keenly perceiving the circumstances surrounding the courts and social expectations, and to constantly re-examine the essence of adjudication. It is also important that the court organization itself, which supports the maintenance and development of such operations of court proceedings, be a resilient organization that can adapt to change and fully respond to these types of developments.

To steadily carry out and strengthen these roles of the courts, it is essential that court officials, including judges, create an environment that can respond flexibly and promptly to change. Reviews have been continuously conducted to date on how to improve each area of the operations of court proceedings, and necessary support measures have been considered and implemented to ensure that personnel, including those with limited experience in their assigned duties or facing various circumstances, can carry out their duties properly without undue burden. It will be important to maintain these types of initiatives in the future. Beyond that, however,

it will also be crucial that court officials themselves have various perspectives, face reality without being bound by precedent or preconception, accumulate experience, and bring all of this together and join forces in an effort to achieve the best possible outcome at that time.

In this sense, it is important that, in addressing various issues, we continue to engage in frank exchanges of opinions that transcend differences in experience and generation, promote deep mutual understanding and constructive considerations, and maintain an attitude of repeatedly practicing and improving based on that practice without fear of failure. In particular, I believe that conscious responses by judges, senior staff, and appellate courts, including the Supreme Court, are essential.

With respect to digitalization, one of the most important issues that the courts are facing today, system development is currently proceeding for nearly all court proceedings, and the updating of the information and communications infrastructure that supports those systems is also advancing in parallel. The objective of the digitalization of court proceedings is the provision of better judicial services by enhancing the convenience afforded to the public, who are the users of the courts, and reinforcing the dispute resolution functions of the courts as a whole. We would also like to reaffirm that the rationalization and enhancement of efficiency of administrative work resulting from digitalization is also an initiative intended to strengthen these functions of court proceedings. At the beginning of the year, the courts achieved a milestone with the introduction of an e-case management system (RoootS) for civil procedures in all courts. I am aware that various challenges arose during this process, including changes of plan, and that the involved personnel worked together to address those challenges. Going forward, other important digitization projects will continue, including systems to handle Phase 3 civil procedures, such as the digitalization of case records, as well as the development of systems for non-contentious civil proceedings, family court proceedings, and criminal and juvenile proceedings. Various twists and turns, both

large and small, may arise during system development, but it is important that even in such cases, court personnel cooperate in line with these objectives and respond dynamically and flexibly to steadily achieve digitalization.

In the civil procedures field, full-scale digitalization under Phase 3 is scheduled to begin by May 2026, and this target is now less than one year away. The full-scale digitalization of civil procedures is a major challenge that precedes the other judicial fields mentioned above, and is an issue that should be addressed with all our efforts. To effectively implement Phase 3, it is essential that we make preparations to master the e-filing and e-record management system (mints) and make it take root, including making users aware of this system. Furthermore, judges must play a central role and take the initiative in proactive discussions regarding specific operations pursuant to the revised Code of Civil Procedure and other statutes, and based on the results, we must confer with relevant organizations, such as bar associations. Regarding the improvement of proceedings with digitalization in mind, earlier discussions have confirmed that we should seek streamlined proceedings and decisions that capture the essence while using digital tools. Going forward, it is important that we establish various methods with broad applicability through individual judges' practices to ensure that the burden on both users and judges is reasonable, while seeking to enhance dispute resolution functions.

In the criminal procedures field as well, as laws amending the Code of Criminal Procedure and other statutes to respond to digitalization were recently enacted, it is necessary to make various preparations for their implementation in the future. On the other hand, looking at recent criminal cases, we can see a situation where criminal cases as a whole, including lay judge (saiban-in) trials, are becoming increasingly complex and difficult due to changes in the nature of cases against the backdrop of changing social conditions and increasing amounts of objective evidence resulting from advances in science and technology. To respond accurately to the public's calls for expeditious trials, the courts presiding over these

procedures will not only need to deepen discussions among judges themselves, but also actively engage in exchanges of opinions with public prosecutors and defense counsel through opportunities such as reviews of individual cases and steadily advance practical initiatives for achieving higher-quality proceedings.

In the family procedures field, a law partially amending the Civil Code and other statutes concerning family law systems was enacted in May of last year. This is a comprehensive revision that broadly reviews matters that become issues in divorce, including the revision of rules regarding parental authority and custody that make it possible to designate both parents as persons who have parental authority after divorce. Other such issues include child support, parent-child contact, and the division of property. These revisions are expected to have a significant impact on judicial practice, including the management of conciliation. Family courts bear important responsibilities for implementing the amendment act, which will be enforced by May of next year. As such, they need to continue steady preparations during the remaining time, including conducting training for family conciliation commissioners, while also deepening improvement initiatives for the management of conciliation, such as efforts to shorten the intervals between hearing dates and further utilization of web conferencing, leading to appropriate proceedings after the amended law comes into effect. In addition, along with the civil non-contentious procedures field, it is necessary in the family procedures field to continue examining rational and efficient administrative practices in preparation for the enforcement of the amended laws, which establish provisions for digitalization, including online applications and the digitalization of records. With respect to juvenile cases, we need to examine and put into practice appropriate investigation and adjudication methods according to the specifics of cases and the problems of individual juveniles, while taking into account changes in social conditions concerning delinquency, and we also need to implement appropriate operations.

In these circumstances where various responsibilities are entrusted to the courts and cases are becoming increasingly complex and difficult, the foundation that will enable courts to continue meeting societal expectations is an environment where court personnel, including judges, can devote themselves to their duties with a sense of fulfillment and without being under an excessive burden. Initiatives for achieving work-life balance and flexible working styles are therefore important. In work practices, the various innovations, rationalizations, efficiency improvements and standardizations that are all based on advances in information and communications technology are highly significant. It is necessary to carry out examinations for the creation of systems that enable court personnel to focus on core and essential duties while solving various issues one by one.

The roles performed by the judiciary are becoming increasingly important. The courts must identify the needs of diverse users and the general public from their perspective and undertake operations from more multifaceted viewpoints than ever before. To achieve this, it is important to approach work with a flexible and rational mindset that values substance over form without being bound by formalities in daily operations.

To conclude my address, I would like to express my expectation that, even during this time of change, each and every member of court personnel will be aware that they support the courts' dispute resolution functions as mandated by the public and that they will fulfill their day-to-day duties with vitality so that the courts can earn the public's unwavering confidence.