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Industry and academic partners, Ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you for joining the Women Empowerment Seminar co-organized by the Embassy of Japan, Talent Corp and Asia School of Business.

I arrived in Malaysia two weeks ago and this is the first big event I am attending in Malaysia. I am deeply honoured to deliver my maiden opening remarks in the presence of so many distinguished speakers and participants.

The theme of today's seminar is "Advancing Equality and Sustained Inclusive Growth".

Achieving sustainable development is an urgent issue for global society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And equal human rights as well as to ensure vitality of society, women's empowerment and ensure equal opportunity regardless of gender are indispensable essence for that. "Empowerment" usually means cultivating the right and ability to decide his/her own life and participating in decision-making at different levels, thus leading to the ability to change social, political and economic situations. Each country has been improving their own policy on these issues based on their respective social situation and are at different stages of empowering women.

According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2022 by the World Economic Forum, Malaysia ranked 103 among 146 countries, while Japan ranked 116. Malaysia and Japan have fallen behind in 2 of the 4 sub-indexes assessed, namely "Economic Participation & Opportunity" and "Political Empowerment". These are the common areas that both countries are struggling and will need to improve on.

Today, we have invited 1 speaker from Japan and 3 speakers from Malaysia for the seminar to discuss these difficult matters in both countries.

This seminar is very timely as it is held at the same time with the G20 Ministerial Conference on Women's Empowerment which is taking place in Bali, Indonesia this week. The Empowerment and Progression of Women's Economic Representation or EMPOWER which is an alliance established by the private sector at the G20 Osaka Summit in 2019 also participated in the conference. This alliance aims to expand women's participation as corporate leaders and to form an organic, autonomous network consisting of G20 private sector representatives to share good practices and provide suggestions to G20 leaders.

I would like to highlight that Ms. Tsukahara, who is the representative for Japan in today's seminar had attended the conference in Bali and will share with us the outcome of the conference. During this seminar, I expect that Ms. Tsukahara will also share with us how the Women Empowerment Ministers in G20 countries are progressing gender equality policies while the speakers from Malaysia and Japan will share women empowerment policies and expecting progress of both countries. I hope that we can get some inspiration from today's discussion to further enhance women empowerment.

There will also be Q&A sessions for the audience who are participating either physically or virtually to ask questions and provide comments on the future of gender equality.

In addition, this year marks the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Look East Policy [or LEP] and I am delighted that today's seminar is one of the events to commemorate this milestone. Since former Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad initiated the Look East Policy in 1982, it has become the basis for bilateral co-operation between Japan and Malaysia. I hope this seminar will be one of the catalysts to foster stronger bilateral relations between our two countries.

Let me conclude my speech by wishing all of you a fruitful and successful seminar. Thank you very much and Terima Kasih.