

# THE FIRST POLICY SPEECH

## BY PRIME MINISTER ISHIBA SHIGERU

OCTOBER 4, 2024

### 1. Introductory remarks

I have now taken up my post as Japan's 102nd prime minister.

"Safety and security for all."

As prime minister of Japan, I will dedicate myself body and soul to defending to the end both Japan and Japan's future.

In stating my determination in this regard, first, concerning the political funding issue and other such matters, I must, with deep remorse, touch on the circumstances that prompted public distrust in politics.

In dealing with the political funding issue, Prime Minister Kishida's initiatives included working to dissolve factions within the Liberal Democratic Party and amending the Political Funds Control Act. He later resigned as faction head to take responsibility for a situation created by a legislator belonging to his faction. These were all actions he decided upon based on his desire to push forward with political reforms.

Moreover, the three years of the Kishida Cabinet were a period when substantial results emerged in concrete form across a wide range of fields, spanning the economy, energy policies, policies related to children, security policies, and diplomatic policies, to name just a few. I extend my wholehearted respect to Mr. Kishida for the tremendous work he did as prime minister.

Based on that mindset and those achievements, we will restore the public's trust that was lost as a result of the political funding issue and other matters and bring about a society that offers safety and security for all.

As we restore the trust in politics that was undermined by the political funding issue, we will also, to an extent beyond anything else to date, explain to the Japanese people the situation in which Japan finds itself and rebuild a Japan of safety, security, and prosperity while earning the public's understanding

and empathy. That is the responsibility to be carried out by those in politics.

Towards that end, we will shape Japan's future and safeguard that future on the basis of five pillars, namely, upholding the rules, protecting Japan, protecting the people, protecting local communities, and protecting opportunities for youth and women.

### 2. Upholding the rules

#### (1) Trust from the public

We will restore the trust given to us by the public. In line with that, we will attain what is "Not politics for politicians, but politics for the people."

As for the problem of omissions within political fundraising reports, first of all we will once again face one by one those Diet members indicated in this matter and, urging them to reflect on the matter, we will do our utmost to establish the ethical consciousness of abiding by the rules.

We must establish having each politician face each and every citizen with sincerity, complying thoroughly with the amended Political Funds Control Act and disclosing the information to the public in unlimited transparency. I give my firm pledge that in order to have the Japanese people trust politics once more, I myself will also demonstrate accountability and do everything in my capacity to increase transparency further.

### 3. Protecting Japan

#### (1) Diplomacy and security

We will protect Japan from the rapidly changing security environment. Aggression against Ukraine by Russia, a permanent member of the UN Security Council, remains underway even now, and war continues to rage. Ukraine today may be East Asia tomorrow. Many people harbor worries such as this.

I have strong feelings about why deterrence failed

to work in Ukraine. With the situation there coupling with the situation in the Middle East and other factors, the international community is becoming increasingly characterized by division and confrontation.

Giving due consideration to the current state of affairs, we will leverage diplomacy grounded in realistic national interests. With the Japan-U.S. alliance at the core, we will increase the number of friendly and like-minded countries and reinforce in a balanced manner our diplomatic and defense capabilities in tandem to achieve peace for Japan and stability in the region.

When doing so, consistent with the vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, we will uphold the international order based on the rule of law and lead efforts to further ensure safety and stability in the region.

The Japan-U.S. alliance is the cornerstone of Japanese diplomacy and security and the foundation for the peace and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region and the international community as a whole.

First and foremost, we will further reinforce the deterrence and the response capabilities of this alliance. In addition, we will work to build up cooperation with like-minded countries. The other day I held telephone conversations with President Biden of the United States of America as well as the leaders of the Republic of Korea (ROK), Australia, and the other G7 member countries.

Japan and the ROK acting in close cooperation amidst the current strategic environment is of extreme importance for the interests of both our nations. Although challenges exist between Japan and the ROK, setting my sights on marking the 60th anniversary of the normalization of Japan-ROK relations next year, I intend to take the relationship of trust forged between Prime Minister Kishida and President Yoon as a cornerstone and make Japan-ROK bilateral cooperation even more solid and wide-reaching. Japan, the United States, and the ROK will also work in even closer cooperation.

With China, we will comprehensively promote a mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests and build up a track record of close communication at all possible levels. At the same time, China is day by day intensifying its unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force in the East China

Sea and the South China Sea. And, last month, there was the tragic case of a young Japanese child losing his precious life after being attacked. This absolutely cannot be overlooked.

We will establish a constructive and stable Japan-China relationship through the efforts of both sides. In this relationship, we will say to China the things that need to be said and strongly urge China to act responsibly, while at the same time continuing dialogues with China on outstanding concerns and cooperating on matters of common interest. We will also advance the Japan-China-ROK trilateral framework.

The abduction of Japanese nationals, an issue whose resolution has time constraints, is a human rights issue about which we cannot let our mindfulness dwindle for even a moment, as the victims and their families continue to age; it is also a violation of Japan's sovereignty. It is one of the highest priority issues for the Ishiba administration. It grieves me deeply that despite more than 20 years passing since the Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration, we have not yet realized the return of the remaining abductees to Japan.

In addition to returning to the starting point of the Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration and working to realize the return of all the abductees to Japan at the earliest possible date, we will also undertake concerted efforts to resolve the outstanding issues of concern with North Korea, consistent with my strong determination in this regard.

We will continue to press forward vigorously with sanctions against Russia and support for Ukraine. While the circumstance surrounding Japan-Russia bilateral relations are now quite harsh, Japan will adhere to its policy of resolving the territorial issue and concluding a peace treaty.

We will continue to work to bolster our cooperation with ASEAN.



We will strengthen our relations with the Global South and advance our efforts to address global-scale issues such as disarmament and non-proliferation and climate change. We will also do our utmost to ensure the safety of Japanese nationals overseas.

Japan now faces the most severe and complex security environment of the post-war period. A series of intrusions by China and Russia into Japan's territorial airspace has also occurred. This is a grave violation of Japan's sovereignty. North Korea continues its nuclear and missile development and in recent years has repeatedly launched ballistic missiles at an unprecedentedly high frequency. It is also pursuing the development of long-range missiles that put the United States of America within range. This is a violation of relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions and it threatens the peace and security of not only Japan but also the region and the international community as a whole. Against this backdrop, it goes without saying that Japan should drastically strengthen its own defense capabilities, grounded in our National Security Strategy.

The members of our Self-Defense Forces (SDF) form the greatest foundation for our defense capabilities. No matter how a nation prepares itself in terms of equipment, reinforcement of the human resources foundation is indispensable when demonstrating defense capabilities.

With a view to improving the living and working environments as well as the treatment of SDF personnel, who safeguard Japan's independence and defend our peace, we will establish a ministerial council. That council, which I as prime minister will head, will urgently examine the current state of affairs and present a concrete plan for improvement.

I will never forget that, during the last war, the largest ground battle in Japan took place in Okinawa, with many Okinawans losing their precious lives. Nor will I ever forget that Okinawa was placed under administration by the United States of America for 27 years after the war ended. We will continue also to work to lessen the impact of U.S. military bases.

If we are to ensure the smooth stationing of U.S. forces in Japan, gaining the understanding and cooperation of the Japanese people, including the people in the local areas directly affected, will be

absolutely critical. We will press ahead with the construction work for the relocation to Henoko, aiming to realize the total return of Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Futenma at the earliest possible date.

In addition, per capita income in Okinawa remains the lowest among all the prefectures, and there also exist issues such as children living in poverty. We must ask if the effects of promoting and developing Okinawa have sufficiently permeated the prefecture, and if the people of Okinawa truly feel those effects in a tangible way. We will continue to provide support to build up the economy of Okinawa while recognizing the sentiments of the Okinawan people.

#### (2) Measures to counter the declining birthrate

The declining birthrate and resulting population decline are what can be called a "silent emergency," affecting the very foundations of our nation.

If the current generation of families with small children isn't happy, there will be no way to overcome the declining birthrate. We will listen closely to the opinions of households with small children and make every possible effort to support families with small children to encourage more young people to start families. We are committed to steadily implementing the Children's Future Strategy and vigorously promoting reforms in work practices, including better use of part-time work arrangements, introducing systems for work intervals to ensure adequate hours given to daily life and to sleeping, and a general change in mindset throughout society. Additionally, we will analyze the causes of declining birthrates and implement appropriate measures that support families raising small children.

The circumstances regarding the declining birthrate vary by region. It's a stark reality that prefectures with low marriage rates also experience higher rates of population decline. If we look at population movement by members of the young generation, over the past decade, in 33 prefectures nationwide, more women than men have moved out. We must create regions that attract young people and women, fostering a diverse, decentralized society. We are fully committed to building communities that appeal to young people, working hand in hand with local revitalization efforts in each area.

#### (3) The economy and fiscal policy

We will ensure that the Japanese economy does indeed wrest itself free from deflation. We will also shape the future of Japan's economy, and safeguard it to the end. To prioritize overcoming deflation, we will adopt an economic and fiscal management approach based on the principle that "a sound economy is the foundation of fiscal health." We will bring about a growth-oriented economy driven by wage increases and investments while improving fiscal conditions, creating an economy and public finances that develop vigorously and are resilient to crises.

We will generate high amounts of added value and enhance productivity through fostering innovation and create a society in which motivated seniors can thrive. Our goal is to restore personal consumption, which accounts for over 50 percent of Japan's GDP, and to achieve a growth-oriented economy that maximizes consumption and investment.

To achieve this, while transitioning from an economy focused on cutting costs to one that creates high added value, we will establish sustainable energy policies and strengthen support for innovation and startups. From the perspective of economic security, we will work on enhancing our resiliency, including through the return of domestic supply chains for semiconductors and other key items, and implement measures to prevent technology outflow. Additionally, we will work to enhance cybersecurity, including through further accelerating our examination of possibly introducing active cyber defense strategies. We aim to restructure a flexible social security system while also conducting a review of our fiscal spending based on data and committing to wise spending practices.

My goal is to achieve an economy that prioritizes increases in GDP per capita in addition to overall national economic growth while also prioritizing improvements in satisfaction and happiness. To this end, we will have the public and private sectors together develop and share comprehensive indicators of 'degree of happiness/degree of satisfaction' and aim to create a society where each individual can thrive and be happy.

#### 4. Protecting the people

##### (1) Wage growth that outpaces price increases

We will safeguard Japan's economy and our citizens'

daily lives.

The public is facing rising prices for fresh food, energy, and more. We must ensure that wage increases that outpace inflation take firm root in society so that people feel certain that their standard of living has truly improved.

Having experienced the 'lost three decades' of measures focused on cost-cutting and overcome three years of difficulties from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Japanese economy has started to improve, with wages also finally rising. However, we are still on the journey to becoming an economy where the public can engage in consumption with peace of mind.

In this context, we will aim for a virtuous cycle of wage increases and alleviating labor shortages by raising the productivity of each individual, increasing added value, raising incomes, and achieving wage growth that surpasses the rise in prices. We will steadily raise the minimum wage by appropriately passing price increases through to product prices and providing support for enhancing productivity and continue with our untiring efforts to reaching the high target of a nationwide average of 1,500 yen per hour within the 2020s. To achieve this, the government will bolster investments in people, such as reskilling of individuals, to create workplaces where individuals will not be disadvantaged regardless of their chosen working styles. We will also intensively consolidate our measures to expand the future economic pie, including improving the digital environment for businesses.

We will create an economy in which high-value goods and services can be sold at fair prices in the global market. We will strengthen the competitiveness of export companies, enhance value creation centering on small- and medium-sized enterprises, increase the percentage of distribution allocated to labor, and bring about bold investments undertaken by public and private sector entities acting together.

Until we establish a positive cycle of growth and distribution where wages rise more than inflation levels and capital investment is undertaken proactively, support is needed for those currently suffering from rising prices. In addition to these measures to address price increases, we will make bold investments in growth sectors through the involvement of both public and private sector entities and, to realize a

growth-oriented economy driven by wage increases and investment, urgently formulate an economic policy package and then work to bring it about.

In the short term, we will provide support to low-income households that are especially affected by rising prices and implement responses well-tailored to local circumstances. We will also focus on structural measures to create a society resilient to rising energy costs as part of our strategy to overcome inflation. Developing new regional revitalization initiatives, improving the environment for raising wages at midsize and small- and medium-sized enterprises, and promoting domestic investment that contributes to growth potential, all aimed at growing Japan's economy and also our local economies.

We will make ensuring the safety and security of our citizens one of our major pillars. This will include recovery and reconstruction from natural disasters in the Noto region and elsewhere, promoting disaster prevention and mitigation, strengthening national resilience, responding to changes in the diplomatic and security environment, and bringing about a society where no one is left behind.

## (2) Energy policy

Ensuring a stable supply and safety of energy is an urgent issue. As we consider the sharp increases in electricity demand in the age of AI, we will enhance energy self-sufficiency while advancing decarbonization. This includes rigorous energy conservation, utilization of nuclear power on the major premise that safety is ensured, the exploration and practical use of domestic resources, and achieving an optimal energy mix of renewable sources such as geothermal energy, in which Japan has high potential. We will protect the Japanese economy from energy constraints through and through. Towards that end, we will accelerate our efforts in Green Transformation (GX), support the diverse initiatives of Asian countries with Japan's technological and financial capabilities, and simultaneously integrate Asia's growth potential into our economy.

## (3) Supporting innovation and startups

To accelerate the revitalization and growth of the Japanese economy, we will promote pioneering

development in frontier fields such as science, technology, innovation, and space, while continuing to strengthen support for startups. We are committed to steadily advancing the government's Five-Year Plan for Promoting Startup to establish the largest startup hub in Asia. We will further bolster conditions conducive to AI research, development, and implementation, while also strengthening the government's role in coordinating AI policy.

## (4) Making Japan an "investment powerhouse"

We will also work on transforming the financial capital markets, which are the foundation of economic activity. We aim to establish a steady flow from savings to investment, continuing our policy of promoting Japan as a leading asset management center that supports citizens in building their wealth. At the same time, we will implement measures to promote bold investments in industry, moving towards becoming an "investment powerhouse."

## (5) Social security policy

The social security system serves as a safety net that provides reassurance to citizens in various circumstances. By alleviating anxiety about the future and creating a Japan where everyone can lead secure and fulfilling lives, we will safeguard our future and avoid passing burdens on to the next generation. This is the responsibility of those who live in the present.

We will review the entire social security system, including healthcare, pensions, childcare, and elderly care, to establish a system that gives citizens peace of mind. In doing so, we will transition to a social security framework that reflects the realities of today, allowing for flexible design that accommodates diverse lifestyles and choices. Considering the challenges of a declining population, we will promote employment for motivated seniors, women, and people with disabilities, aiming for a society where everyone can make the most of their potential, regardless of age.

## (6) Ensuring public security

We will promote crime prevention measures to ensure that everyone, including children, women, and the elderly, can live at ease, and we will make Japan the safest country in the world.

## (7) Disaster prevention and reconstruction from the Great East Japan Earthquake

We will protect the lives, safety, and property of our citizens from recurring disasters.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, people were unable even to return to their hometowns. When it finally became possible to visit, on the Noto Peninsula this year, people were in a single instant deprived of their long-awaited family gatherings by an earthquake on New Year's Day. I extend my heartfelt condolences to those who lost their lives and my deepest sympathies to those affected. Shortly after, the earthquake-affected areas were further stricken by torrential rains, leading to river flooding and landslides in one location after another, resulting in the loss of many precious lives. To restore the vibrant Noto we knew before these recurring disasters, we will further accelerate our efforts towards recovery and creative reconstruction.

In Japan, one of the world's most disaster-prone countries, we must urgently build a disaster-resilient nation that gives utmost priority to human life and is able to respond rapidly to the increasing frequency and severity of floods and storms in recent years. We will promote initiatives for disaster prevention, mitigation, and national resilience.

To ensure thorough disaster preparedness, we will fundamentally strengthen the current functions of the Cabinet Office's Disaster Management Bureau in terms of both budget and personnel. Additionally, we will advance our preparations for the establishment of a dedicated Disaster Management Agency, led by a specialized minister, to ensure constant and comprehensive readiness even before a disaster takes place.

In Japan when a disaster occurs, those affected often face harsh living conditions in evacuation shelters. In the case of the Kumamoto Earthquake of 2016, the number of people who died due to their health deteriorating while living in shelters or other reasons was four times higher than the number whose deaths were directly attributable to the earthquake. It is essential to reach out to those suffering from great sorrow and anxiety due to the disaster, providing them with warm meals and a living environment where they feel safe.

To eliminate deaths related to, but not directly caused by, disasters, we will review the standards for evacuation

shelters giving due consideration to the Sphere standards, which delineate minimum requirements that shelters should meet. We will establish a public-private partnership system before disasters strike to ensure the rapid deployment of toilets, food trucks, beds, and baths after a disaster strikes.

Without the reconstruction of Fukushima, there can be no recovery for the Tohoku region; without the recovery of Tohoku, there can be no revival of Japan. We will make all possible efforts towards restoring people's daily lives and rebuilding the industries and livelihoods of all those affected by the disaster. In response to the import restrictions on Japanese fishery products imposed by certain countries and regions, we will leverage the efforts made by the Kishida administration to advocate emphatically at every opportunity for the immediate lifting of these restrictions. Additionally, we will responsibly support the further development of Japan's fishing industry by expanding domestic demand for affected fishery products and exploring new export markets.

## 5. Protecting local communities

### (1) Regional Revitalization

We will return to the starting point of regional revitalization and remain committed to fully protecting local communities. Ten years ago, I was appointed as the first Minister of State for Regional Revitalization. I worked diligently on initiatives such as relocating the Agency for Cultural Affairs to Kyoto and establishing the Regional Revitalization Promotion Grant, which clearly distinguished itself from previous subsidies. Since then, I have seen many residents across the country unite in their efforts for regional revitalization, and I have drawn inspiration from their determination.

Former Prime Minister Takeshita once stated, "Each local community must independently and responsibly utilize its own wisdom and passion, with both small villages and large towns collectively considering and practicing regional development themselves." This involves various stakeholders, including industrial sector entities, government agencies, educational institutions including not only universities but also junior high and high schools, financial institutions, workers, and media organizations. By pooling their

collective wisdom, these diverse local stakeholders can maximize regional potential, ensuring safety and security for all, whether they live in urban or rural areas, and fostering a society where everyone can feel hope and happiness. This embodies the spirit of regional revitalization. We will once again cultivate employment and income in rural areas while fostering safety and security in urban environments.

Local regions are the main drivers of growth. We will learn from the achievements made under previous regional revitalization efforts as well as from points for reflection that emerged and restart them as Regional Revitalization 2.0.

To further strengthen support for initiatives across the country, we aim to double the amount of funding allocated to regional revitalization grants compared to the amount allotted in the initial budget.

In response to the declining birthrate, aging population, and population decrease, we will strengthen the Council for the Realization of the Vision for a Digital Garden City Nation and establish a headquarters for the Creation of New Regional Economies and Living Environments. The headquarters will develop a basic plan which the government will implement intensively over the next decade. We will also explore the effective utilization of new technologies, such as blockchain, and the significant influx of inbound tourism to promote local revitalization while protecting people's daily lives.

Insofar as the agricultural, forestry, and fisheries sectors, which are fundamental to regional growth, not only generate employment and income in rural areas but also contribute to national security, we will maximize their potential. Under a new basic law, we will implement planned and concentrated measures in the first five years to ensure food security, establish a food system that is in harmony with the environment, sustainably develop these sectors, and foster newly-emerging undertakings for agricultural, mountain, and fishing communities, notably in hilly and mountainous regions.

We will also further promote the export of agricultural, forestry, and fishery products while giving proper consideration to maintaining our domestic production capacity. Our initiatives will promote the transition to a sustainable food industry.

We will build a resilient forestry industry through circular forestry practices and other initiatives and work to revitalize the fishing and aquatic resources sector by, for example, transitioning to different kinds of operational techniques or to aquaculture in response to changes in the marine environment, or by expanding at a nationwide level economic activities that utilize ocean resources.

We will promote adding value within the tourism industry while strengthening support for regional culture and arts, as part of our vision to realize a culture- and arts-promoting nation. Regional transportation serves as the foundation of regional revitalization. We will make a strong push to ensure people's ability to get around, aiming to eliminate "transportation gaps" across the country.

Regional revitalization is an ongoing issue. If you want to nurture a community, start by nurturing the people. This all comes down to cultivating human resources. With the national government, local governments, and citizens coming together as one, I will stand at the fore as we build momentum for continually taking on the revitalization of our regional areas.

## (2) Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, Japan

Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, Japan will be an excellent opportunity to deepen global exchanges and showcase Japan's charms to the world. It aims to attract many visitors, allowing them to enjoy their visit while also inspiring each visitor with his or her own dreams and hopes for the future. We are committed to working closely with all stakeholders to ensure its success.

## 6. Protect opportunities for young people and women

We must create a society where among young people and women the happiness of each individual is prioritized, and their human rights are protected.

### (1) Educational reform

Nurturing people builds the nation. Under this principle, we aim to cultivate the individuals' ability to think for themselves and freely design their own lives, leveraging digital technologies. We will strive to create a society where everyone has access to optimal education. Additionally, we will make all-out efforts to revitalize public education by conducting reviews

of working environments and conditions for teachers and staff.

To rebuild a resilient, sustainable, and economically fruitful Japan, it is essential to make the greatest possible investment in human resources, including education and reskilling. We will establish a system that allows individuals to access necessary learning opportunities at any stage of their lives as many times as desired.

### (2) Women's empowerment and women's participation

To dramatically change the decision-making process, for both the public and private sectors, we will set a goal for women to participate in all organizational decision-making. We will establish guidelines for achieving this and implement them through a structured approach. Redressing the wage gap between men and women remains an urgent issue. To ensure that more women can continue participating in social activities for an extended period, we will lead a national discussion to realize necessary institutional reforms.

### (3) Suicide prevention

Suicides among women increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and remain high, while the trend towards suicide among children and young people is also on the rise. In response, we will aggressively advance comprehensive suicide prevention measures.

## 7. Conclusion

### (1) Constitutional reform

Regarding constitutional reform, I hope to see it being proposed to the Diet during my tenure as prime minister. Moving forward, I look forward to constructive discussions that transcend party lines in the Deliberative Councils on the Constitution alongside an active deepening of national discourse on this matter.

For Japan, stable Imperial Succession is of the utmost importance. In particular, ensuring an adequate number of imperial family members is a matter of great urgency. I earnestly await active discussions in the Diet with the aim of attaining a consensus of the legislature as soon as possible.

### (2) Politics that earns understanding and empathy

In 1985, a year before I became a member of the Diet, I was deeply moved by the words of Mr. WATANABE Michio, a former member of the House of Representatives, that "The job of a politician is to speak the truth with courage and sincerity." For the past 40 years, I have aspired to do just that, and today, I stand before you in this chamber. I am aware that the number of citizens with faith in politics may now be quite low. But does politics have faith in the people? Is there a mindset that suggests the citizens won't understand anyway, or that the public will forget soon? Politics without faith in the citizens cannot expect the citizens to have faith in politics. By speaking the truth with courage and sincerity and garnering understanding and empathy from the Japanese people, I am determined to restore trust in politics, create the future of Japan, and protect that future fully and without fail.

These are my thoughts.

The Japan of the past may not have been as wealthy as it is today. However, it was a society where people cared for each other more deeply, and there were smiles on people's faces. Somehow, we have transformed into a society where people drag each other down and speak ill of one another. I want to restore the smiles to people once again.

"Safety and security for all."

I sincerely ask for the understanding and cooperation of all citizens and of the esteemed members of the Diet gathered here today representing the people. ●

