

**A Speech by Yasuhisa Shiozaki**

**Technical Workshop Hosted by CDC East Asia and Pacific Regional Office**

**"Strengthening Technical Partnerships to Combat Antimicrobial Resistance  
in the East Asia and Pacific Region and Around the World"**

**August 28–29, 2024, Tokyo, Japan**

Ladies and Gentlemen, Colleagues, and Esteemed Partners,

It is my great honor to address you today at the technical workshop on antimicrobial resistance organized by CDC East Asia and Pacific Regional Office, a new vital hub for health security in our region.

First, let me extend my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Michelle McConnell for organizing this meaningful conference ahead of the UN General Assembly High-Level Meeting on AMR. Timing, as they say, is of essence, and I am glad we are making the most of it to strengthen collaboration in the Asia-Pacific region at just the right moment.

As we face this critical moment in global health, the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the urgent need for international cooperation, with AMR being a major challenge.

Over the past decade, I have been engaged in addressing AMR from a political perspective. As we approach the UN General Assembly AMR High-Level Meeting, I would like to reflect on both past efforts and future directions from that perspective.

**(AMR: A Persistent Challenge)**

AMR has been a concern since Dr. Alexander Fleming's warning in 1945, but it has only gained significant political attention in the past decade. The turning point came around 2014–2015 when leaders like UK Prime Minister Cameron,

US President Obama, and German Chancellor Merkel recognized AMR as a global threat.

Following the 2015 WHO resolution on the AMR Global Action Plan, Germany immediately responded at the G7 Summit in Elmau a month later. This was followed by the G7 Health Ministers' Meeting in Berlin in October 2015, where I saw firsthand the gaps in our response as the Health Minister of Japan. Imagine my surprise when I realized Japan was the only G7 country without a National Action Plan !

In June 2016, Prime Minister Abe addressed AMR at the Ise-Shima Summit, and later that year, I highlighted the issue at the G7 Health Ministers' Meeting in Kobe. These efforts culminated in the first UN General Assembly High-Level Meeting on AMR in the same month of September 2016.

#### **(Lessons from COVID-19 in Combating AMR)**

The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us vital lessons that we must apply to our fight against AMR. Key among them is the need for standardized real-time data sharing and robust surveillance systems to detect resistance patterns early and take effective action.

The pandemic also underscored the importance of clear public messaging. We now have the chance to launch awareness and antibiotic stewardship programs, leveraging the communication strategies refined during COVID-19.

The global response to the pandemic showed the power of united action, and we must now channel that same spirit into enhancing cooperation and funding for AMR initiatives and research.

#### **(Recognizing Pandemics and AMR as Security Threats)**

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that health crises, including pandemics and AMR, are not just public health issues—they are national and economic security threats. We must all recognize that AMR also has the potential to disrupt economies, strain national resources, and challenge societal stability.

In my 28-year career as a Member of Parliament, I have learned that "global health" does not usually win votes, as politicians often focus on specific group interests and public opinion. However, between 2014 and 2017, when I served as Minister of Health, there was an exception.

During the Ebola outbreak, with Prime Minister Abe's support, we led Japan's investment in CEPI—a pandemic vaccine development engine—by framing health crises as national security issues. This approach, combined with dialogue between health and financial authorities, made it easier to secure political commitment.

Integrating AMR into national security frameworks and treating it with urgency would secure greater political commitment and ensure a more effective crisis response. Promoting collaboration between health and financial authorities is likely to ensure smoother budget allocation and more effective responses when crises arise.

#### **(Addressing Untapped Agendas)**

While the global community has focused on pandemic preparedness, efforts to develop new antibiotics have lagged. Despite some progress with "push and pull incentives" in G7 discussions, the commitment remains far insufficient. We must overcome this serious "market failure" with the strongest political will.

Another overlooked issue is the balance between antibiotic use and regulation, much like the tension between economic growth and environment in climate change debates.

This conflict exists both within and between nations, especially in the context of AMR and the One Health approach. We must place greater emphasis on the importance of "AMR in the environment." Like climate change, it is a shared challenge that requires innovative solutions and strong political leadership.

#### **(Global Leadership and the UNGA High-Level Meeting on AMR)**

A key milestone in our efforts is the AMR High-Level Meeting next month in New York, where heads of state, government, and health ministers will address this critical issue. AMR has secured this opportunity twice—first in 2016 and now

again—but it may be another five years before we get a third chance. We must make the most of this opportunity.

The Global Leaders Group (GLG) on AMR, of which I am a member, was established in the fall of 2020 and is chaired by Mia Amor Mottley, the Prime Minister of Barbados. The GLG is an independent, high-level global body, comprising around 20 prominent figures from various fields, including Dame Sally Davies, a former Chief Medical Officer for England. The GLG has been providing key recommendations, emphasizing the need for sustained political commitment, increased funding for AMR initiatives, and stronger global coordination.

The significance of the High-Level Meeting lies in adopting a Political Declaration, which, while not legally binding, carries the weight of global consensus and drives action. This commitment can be pivotal in solving global challenges.

I believe there are two particularly important steps forward in the Political Declaration so far.

First is the establishment of an independent panel for evidence for action against AMR, as the lack of solid data on antibiotic resistance has hindered progress. This panel, with a clear timeline, will lay the necessary groundwork for AMR measures.

Second, the emphasis on “access” to antibiotics. While efforts have focused for some time on appropriate use, developing countries stress that “access” is equally critical. Ensuring “access” is as important as proper use, as more people die from lack of access than from AMR itself.

#### **(Building on Our Legacy in the Asia-Pacific)**

As we look back, the lead-up to the High-Level Meeting has been exhilarating, but the real work begins after the “celebration.” It is crucial to use the Political Declaration to implement actions at national, regional, and global levels. To do this, stakeholders must regularly come together, as we are today, to review progress and challenges.

Our commitment to combating AMR in the Asia–Pacific region is unwavering. Japan brought AMR to the forefront of our regional health agenda, by hosting the first Ministerial conference on AMR in the Asia–Pacific in April of 2016, the year of Ise–Shima G7 Summit. While the ministerial meetings paused due to COVID–19, discussions have still continued at the working level. I hope that the ministerial meetings would resume soon.

As we build on this legacy, we must strengthen regional collaboration by enhancing AMR coordination mechanisms—networks that unite governments, health organizations, research institutions, the private sector, and civil society.

Sharing best practices and coordinating initiatives will create a unified regional approach greater than the sum of its parts.

#### **(The Role of the CDC in Supporting Regional and Global AMR Efforts)**

The CDC has been, and will continue to be, an indispensable partner in our shared regional AMR priorities. The CDC can offer technical assistance and capacity–building support to strengthen regional surveillance, laboratory capabilities, and health system responses. The CDC can also facilitate the establishment or enhancement of platforms for sharing standardized AMR data within the region and globally.

Additionally, the CDC can assist in developing harmonized AMR policies and treatment guidelines, ensuring a consistent and effective approach to AMR. By supporting regional public awareness campaigns, the CDC can help change behaviors around antibiotic use, which is critical to reducing resistance.

#### **(Conclusion)**

In conclusion, combating AMR demands the same urgency we applied to COVID–19. We must strengthen surveillance, promote responsible antibiotic use, harmonize policies, and enhance regional collaboration. Recognizing AMR as a national and economic security threat for each country is key to mobilizing the necessary resources and political will.

**With support from the CDC, global partners, and the Global Leaders Group on AMR, I am confident that we can turn AMR from a looming threat into a challenge we can overcome with determination and unity.**

**Thank you.**