

Integrating Environmental Principles into the Constitution of Japan: A Imperative for Our Shared Future

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Discussion surrounding constitutional revision in Japan has intensified following the formation of the Takaichi administration. Kankyo Bunmei 21 (Environmental Civilization 21) established its constitution committee in 2004, prompted by a remark from then-Representative Kato in our June 1996 newsletter: *"The environment is nowhere to be found in the Constitution."* Since then, our organization has consistently advocated for integrating environmental principles into the Constitution of Japan.

Over time, this proposal has evolved. Beginning with the fifth draft, its scope expanded beyond traditional environmental protection to embrace "sustainability," culminating in our current proposal to add explicit "principles of the environment and sustainability."

This evolution reflects a growing recognition that climate change and environmental degradation pose grave threats to Japanese society and public well-being. In collaboration with like-minded scientists, Kankyo Bunmei 21 has been publishing a web series titled *"As Climate Change Impacts Intensify: Are Our Lives and Japanese Society Still Sustainable?"*

We strongly believe that advancing an environmental constitutional amendment is now more urgent than ever, for three key reasons:

1. Environmental Sustainability Is the Foundation of Daily Life and the Economy

Climate change is already inflicting severe, irreversible damage on daily life and economic activity in Japan. This year, multiple typhoons struck as early as June, triggering widespread flooding and agricultural damage across the country. Unusually early heat arrived in May, with temperatures topping 30° C in several regions, and forecasts predict even more severe heatwaves this summer. Recent years have also brought an upsurge in wildfires and wild bear encounters—trends linked to climate-driven aridity and shifting mountain ecosystems. Furthermore, extreme heat is degrading labor productivity and raising heatstroke rates, impairing corporate

economic activity while placing severe stress on families unable to engage in outdoor activities.

Despite these existential threats, current constitutional debates under the Takaichi administration focus almost exclusively on enshrining the Self-Defense Forces in Article 9, including emergency clauses, and introducing the National Referendum Act—entirely ignoring environmental sustainability, the very bedrock of our society.

The Constitution is the supreme law established by the people to protect their rights and freedoms by defining the limits and obligations of state power. We must not settle for amendments that prioritize short-term political agendas while overlooking the issues most vital to public survival and well-being.

2. Environmental Principles Reinforce Global Peace and Stability

It is well understood that the “environment” was not included in the Constitution enacted eighty years ago in the wake of World War II, when modern environmental crises did not exist. In today’s world, however, the “environment”—the very foundation of all life forms and our socio-economic activity—is being destroyed by wars and internal conflicts, recognized as the worst forms of environmental destruction. People’s livelihoods, the history and culture they have built, and above all, their lives and dignity are being undermined. Military operations not only destroy lives, communities, and infrastructure, but also generate massive carbon emissions—for example, emissions from operations and reconstruction in Gaza are estimated to exceed the annual emissions of over 100 countries combined (Kazuo Matsushita, 2026).

In an increasingly volatile world, enshrining environmental protection in the Constitution would reinforce Japan’s “Peace Constitution.” Establishing environmental conservation as a constitutional imperative provides a legal and ethical safeguard against involvement in foreign conflicts, military expansion, and unchecked arms exports. The respect Japan commands internationally stems directly from the commitment of its people to peace and human dignity.

3. Proposing an Environmental Clause Catalyzes Vital National Dialogue

According to a Yomiuri Shimbun survey, “environmental issues” ranked third (at 29%) among topics of particular interest regarding the Constitution, following

“renunciation of war and military force” (57%) and “issues concerning the Emperor and the Imperial Family” (33%). Furthermore, when asked which areas should be addressed by amending existing articles or adding new ones, “the right to live in a healthy environment” ranked fourth (at 27%), trailing only “maintaining a military for self-defense” (35%), “maintaining sound public finances” (33%), and “making education free of charge” (28%).

Despite this clear interest, environmental issues remain sidelined in political debates—largely because citizens have historically relied on NPOs, politicians, and bureaucrats to lead the discussion. Formally introducing an environmental clause into the national dialogue would empower citizens, particularly younger generations, to take ownership of their future.

While some environmental organizations worry that engaging in constitutional debate might open the door to altering Article 9, passive inaction risks failing both peace and the environment. By advocating for an environmental clause, we can build vital bridges between environmental and peace advocates to secure a sustainable future.

(Translated by Hideyuki Mori)