

January 15, 2026

Sanae Takaichi
Prime Minister of Japan
Cabinet Secretariat, Government of Japan
1-6-1 Nagata-cho, Chiyoda-ku
Tokyo 100-8968 Japan

CC: Minister of State for Economic Security Kimi Onoda
CC: Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi
CC: Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Ryosei Akazawa

Re: Integrating Human Rights into Japan's Foreign and Economic Security Policy

Dear Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi,

We, the undersigned nongovernmental organizations, are writing to call on the Japanese government to adopt legislation and undertake reforms to put human rights at a center of Japan's foreign, trade and economic security policy. Specifically, we urge the Japanese government to adopt legally binding requirements for businesses to conduct human rights and environmental due diligence in their operations in global value chains; complement them with import and export bans on goods produced through means involving forced labor; and dutifully enforce those standards in consultation with other concerned governments, including the European Union and Southeast Asian nations. To mitigate the impact of massive cuts to foreign assistance by other donor governments, we also urge the government of Japan to explore new ways to fund independent media and civil society organizations operating in autocratic countries or in exile.

These reforms would not only strengthen Japan's autonomy and strategic advantage by strengthening its supply chains and enhancing the competitiveness of Japanese companies in international markets, they would also serve to elevate the Japanese government's moral standing in the international community.

Human rights abuses are rampant, even increasing, across the world. Government forces and non-state armed groups are harming civilians in violation of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. Millions of people have become refugees due to armed conflict. Others are struggling because of rising costs of living, economic disparities and the effects of climate change.

With the global rise in authoritarianism, governments—using the pretext of “national security”—including espionage prevention and counterterrorism, are suppressing and surveilling civil society activists, lawyers, journalists, researchers, human rights defenders, and political opponents for their peaceful dissent. Many have been threatened, arbitrarily detained, mistreated, wrongfully prosecuted, and even forcibly disappeared or killed. Refugees and migrants face discrimination, as do ethnic and religious minorities.

Many of these victims of injustice continue to rely on the support of rights-respecting democracies. However, that expectation is floundering. The administration of President Donald Trump has severely undermined human rights in the United States and around the world, including through drastic cuts to foreign aid with often deadly results. The European Union, the United Kingdom and other Western democracies are failing to fulfill their potential.

There is thus a growing void in global human rights leadership—a void Japan has the capacity to fill. We hope that Japan can build its foreign and economic security policy around human rights, democracy, and the rule of law—its greatest foreign policy asset.

Thank you for your consideration. We would be pleased to discuss these and other matters of mutual concern with you and the pertinent government officials at any time. We can be reached at doik@hrw.org.

Sincerely,

2 Coordinating Organizations

Human Rights Watch

Human Rights Now

18 Organizations (Japanese alphabetical order)

Pacific Asia Resource Center (PARC)

THE SOCIETY TO HELP RETURNNEES FROM JAPAN TO NORTH KOREA

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL JAPAN

Friends of the Earth Japan

The Japanese Workers' Committee for Human Rights (JWCHR)

Cambodia National Rescue Movement in Japan

Federation of Workers' Union of the Burmese Citizen in Japan

Action against Child Exploitation

Africa Japan Forum

Japan Uyghur Association

Human Rights Watch
Human Rights Now
South Mongolia Congress
Lady Liberty Hong Kong (LLHK)
Vietnamese Association in Japan (VAJ)
Japan National Assembly of Disabled Peoples' International
Students For a Free Tibet, Japan
Social Connection for Human Rights (SCHR)

Annex

Trade and Business in Japan's Foreign and Economic Security Policy

Millions of people worldwide work in global value chains, and many face abuses such as forced labor, child labor, sexual harassment, exposure to toxic substances, retaliation for organizing, and low wages. While Japan has non-binding 2022 [Guidelines](#) on Respect for Human Rights in Responsible Supply Chains, Japan does not have mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence to address value chain abuses. Japan also has not yet introduced import or export bans to curb egregious human rights abuses such as forced labor.

We urge your government to:

- Introduce legally binding mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence obligations for Japanese companies operating domestically and abroad, as well as foreign companies operating in Japan.
- Complement legally binding mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence with import and export bans on goods produced through means involving forced labor.

Collecting Accurate Information: Funding Independent Media and Civil Society Organizations

Foreign policy issues, including those related to global and economic security, cannot be effectively formulated without access to accurate information. Independent research and information form the foundation of accurate knowledge about world affairs. In countries such as Japan, where freedom of expression is protected, abuses and corruption can be investigated and exposed by independent media and monitoring groups. But obtaining similar information in autocratic countries is difficult, making it challenging to know the situation on the ground.

Until 2025, the difficult, invaluable work of collecting and publishing information that is inconvenient to authoritarian governments has been primarily undertaken by independent media groups and nongovernmental human rights organizations working on fact-finding and accountability.

Now, however, many of these organizations are facing an existential crisis due to the Trump administration's [termination](#) of funding for most US foreign assistance programs implemented by the US State Department and US Agency for International Development (USAID).

In 2023, USAID “funded training and support for 6,200 journalists, assisted 707 non-state news outlets, and supported 279 media-sector civil society organizations dedicated to strengthening independent media,” and “the 2025 foreign aid budget included \$268,376,000 allocated by Congress to support ‘independent media and the free flow of information,’” according to [Reporters Without Borders](#), which cited a USAID fact sheet that has since been taken offline.

The funding cut has devastated independent media and fact-finding groups, eroding the quality and quantity of information about human rights abuses, war crimes and crimes against humanity, corruption, and public health emergencies. Researchers and journalists investigating government wrongdoing in [China](#), [North Korea](#), [Myanmar](#), and elsewhere have been compelled to [stop many projects](#).

Until now, the Japanese government has not funded independent media and civil society organizations operating in autocratic countries or in exile, even while utilizing the information and research such groups have produced. With many of these organizations on the brink of collapse, it is the right moment for the Japanese government to change course and support the collection and publication of information from countries without freedom of expression and media freedom. Such support would not only inform Japanese policymaking but also contribute to shaping global public opinion that accurately reflects the realities on the ground.

We urge your government to:

- Fund independent media groups, including those working in exile, working on authoritarian countries, and nongovernmental organizations working on human rights, humanitarian issues, fact-finding, and accountability.

In authoritarian countries, the Japanese government should adopt a policy to allow funding for groups being persecuted by local authorities. Where needed, the Japanese government should use foreign assistance to support international or Japanese groups that provide grants to relevant programs.