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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Human Rights Now, a non- governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[26 May 2025]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.

Sex-based Violence against Women and Girls in Japan's Entertainment Industry

1. Introduction

Human Rights Now is deeply concerned over sex-based violence against women and girls (VAWG) in Japan, particularly in the media and entertainment industry, where it remains a persistent problem as recognized in the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights (UN Working Group) May 2024 report.[1]

According to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, more than 20% of actors/stuntpeople have experienced sexual harassment at work.[2] Since about 2015, victims of sexual assault and abuse in the media and entertainment industry have begun to speak out as part of Japan's MeToo movement, with prominent examples including sexual assault against journalist Shiori Ito by a former TBS TV reporter[3] and victims of Johnny Kitagawa, which reportedly included over 1000 boys, many of whom were performers within his agency, sexually abused by Kitagawa over four decades and leading to no serious accountability.[4] The recent Fuji TV scandal,[5] discussed in this statement, demonstrates that despite past scandals involving sexual assault in Japan's entertainment and media industry, both the government and industry companies continue to fail to adequately address the problem. It also demonstrates an entrenched culture of sexual exploitation, lack of human rights awareness, and need for urgent action in the industry.

In line with the UN Working Group's recommendations, HRN calls on relevant business actors in Japan's entertainment and media industry to establish independent grievance mechanisms, to conduct serious, transparent, and independent investigations of complaints, to ensure accountability, and to strengthen governance mechanisms to implement a clear human rights policy and eliminate VAWG in their business.

We further urge the government of Japan to pass mandatory human rights due diligence legislation, establish a National Human Rights Institution in accordance with the Paris Principles, and strength its legal framework to eliminate business-related VAWG.

2. Fuji TV Scandal

Fuji Television is one of Japan's leading television stations. In June 2023, a female announcer at the station claimed that she had been sexually abused by a male entertainer previously a member of a boy band affiliated with Johnny & Associates and who had been hosting a program on Fuji Television. The entertainer had invited her for dinner and she was unable to refuse due to professional considerations.[6]

Following the incident, the announcer reported the sexual abuse directly to Fuji TV. As a result of the incident, the announcer suffered severe psychological trauma, was hospitalized, and eventually resigned. Despite the company's awareness of the allegations, Fuji TV failed to take appropriate measures required by the Equal Employment Opportunity Law for victims of sexual harassment. Without conducting an appropriate investigation for the case, it continued to use the alleged abuser for their TV program and connected him with the company's long-time legal advisor.

In early January 2025, Dalton Investments, which own 7% of Fuji TV's stock, lambasted Fuji TV's corporate governance in an open letter.[7] Following this external pressure, Fuji TV held a press conference, after which more than 70 companies, including Toyota, Nissan and McDonald's, suspended advertisements.[8] An independent third-party committee was established by the company to investigate the allegations against the abuser and the company's response.[9] The committee's report ultimately determined that the incident "was recognized as sexual violence and occurred as an extension of work." The committee also criticized Fuji TV executives for siding with abuser and acting in his interest, which contributed to the "secondary victimization" experienced by the announcer.

3. Broader Issues within the Industry

The Fuji TV scandal highlights broader issues contributing to VAWG within the Japanese media and entertainment industry, including using female employees to entertain business clients, entrenched power disparities between male executives and female employees, widespread dysfunction in corporate governance fostering a toxic company culture, and lack of an adequate grievance mechanism, as further described below. The announcer's actual experience illustrates how industry norms not only enable but normalize and encourage VAWG.

a) Using Female Employees to Entertain Business Clients: The third-party committee's report recognizes the common practice of deliberately inviting female employees to company meetings based on "gender, age, appearance, etc." to build positive relationships and "entertain" major business partners.[10] This practice tokenizes women and elevates the risk of sexual harassment and violence in business settings.

b) Power Disparity Between Female Employees and Male Executives: According to the report, many female announcers have difficulties clearly refusing invitations to social gatherings from business partners. There is a power imbalance between influential entertainers and industry leaders versus female announcers, placing female announcers in a vulnerable position. However, decisions are left to the individual, and even if they suffer harm, it is treated as a personal matter.

c) Corporate Governance Dysfunction and Toxic Company Culture: Fuji TV's lack of transparency and accountability in response to the allegation, and the leadership team's decision to side with the abuser rather than with the victim, reflect major dysfunction in corporate governance that pervades the entire industry. This sort of governance, which stems from an insulated and homogenous board, breeds an atmosphere of tolerance and impunity towards misconduct and a wider company culture rampant with harassment and violence.[11]

d) Lack of an adequate grievance mechanism: The situation at Fuji Television demonstrates that grievance mechanisms in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights are not functioning at the national, industry, and corporate levels, and that victims are unable to obtain appropriate redress.

Following 2023 revelation of widespread sexual abuse of children by Johnny Kitagawa, Japanese media companies that continued their business relationships with his agency were criticized by the UN Working Group for failing to address their responsibility in covering up sexual abuse. In response, major Japanese television networks established human rights policies. However, sexual harassment and sexual abuse against female workers have not been prioritized as human rights issues. It is difficult to say that these networks have adequately addressed the serious challenges of structural gender discrimination and the vulnerability of female workers.

From February to March 2025, HRN conducted a survey on the human rights policies of key Japanese TV stations, including Fuji TV, to be released in a report in May 2025. Preliminary results show that while most TV stations have human right policies and conduct human rights due diligence, implementation lacks specificity and remains vague.

Japan revised sex crime in the penal code with a new consent-based definition of rape. However, due to the inadequacy of Japan's legal system regarding corporate obligations related to human rights and harassment prevention, business-related sexual violence and sexual harassment remain widespread, and no effective measures have been taken.

4. Recommendations

HRN is greatly concerned with the persistence of rampant VAWG in the media and entertainment industry in Japan, as well as the discriminatory attitudes and culture of impunity by such businesses.

To address these issues, we urge the government of Japan to:

- Fully implement the UN Working Group's recommendations in its May 2024 report on Japan, including establishing mandatory human rights due diligence;
- Establish a National Human Rights Institution;
- Ratify ILO Convention No. 190 and revise the Equal Employment Opportunity Law to prohibit sexual harassment and strengthen corporate obligations and sanctions;
- Commence a nationwide campaign to prevent sexual violence and harassment.

We further call on relevant business actors in Japan's entertainment and media industry to:

- Fully implement the UN Working Group's recommendation's in its May 2024 report on Japan, including the establishment of non-state-based independent and effective grievance mechanisms to address business-related human rights abuses, including VAWG, that persist in the media and entertainment industry and in Japan at large;^[12]
- Support transparency and accountability in business governance structures within the media and entertainment industry;
- Address the roots causes of the prevalence of VAWG to eliminate it in the entire value chain;
- Ensure that companies' Board of Directors and top management are diverse, selected based on adequately trained in human rights, and willing to create a management structure and company culture that promotes inclusivity, transparency, and accountability.

[1] "Visit to Japan—Report of the Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises" (WG Report), A/HRC/56/55/Add.1, 1 May 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc5655add1-visit-japan-report-working-group-issue-human-rights-and>.

[2] WG Report, id., para. 74.

[3] Khalil, "Is the downfall of a Japanese star a turning point for women's rights?", BBC, 23 Feb. 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cd0nzmmzvyno>.

[4] McCurry, "Fallout from alleged sexual assault by former J-pop star marks cultural shift in Japan," Guardian, 24 Jan. 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jan/24/masahiro-nakai-fuji-tv-japan-sexual-assault-allegations-ntwnfb>.

[5] WG Report, supra, note 1, Section C.

[6] NHK, "Fuji TV third-party committee: 'Sexual violence an extension of work,'" 21 Mar. 2025, <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/news/html/20250331/k10014765711000.html>.

[7] Otake, "U.S. investment firm demands Fuji TV probe Nakai's alleged sex misconduct," Japan Times, 15 Jan. 2025, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2025/01/15/japan/media/fuji-tv-investor-masahiro-nakai/>.

[8] McCurry, supra, note 4.

[9] NHK, supra, note 6.

[10] Asahi Shimbun, "EDITORIAL: Fuji TV has long way to go to recover trust after sex assault", 2 Apr. 2025, <https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/15694220>.

[11] Byrne, “Fuji TV scandal: A lesson in bad culture,” Corporate Governance Institute,
<https://www.thecorporategovernanceinstitute.com/insights/news-analysis/fuji-tv-scandal-a-lesson-in-bad-culture/>.

[12] WG Report, *supra*, note 1, para.24.