Keynote Address

We demand politics of freedom and democracy.

SEALDs (Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy) is a platform of emergency actions by students to protect a free and democratic Japan. We are a group of youths from late teens to early 20s. We aim to rethink and enact democracy.

We uphold the tradition of freedom and democracy in Japan that has been built for the past 70 years after the World War II. Our principal aim is to protect the Constitution of Japan which is fundamental to this tradition. The philosophy of Japan’s Peace Constitution is a project that is yet to be accomplished. In order to protect our Constitution which is currently in danger, we state a clear vision with focus on Constitutionalism, Social Security, and National Security.

The situation of Japanese politics continues to worsen. In 2014, the Secret Protection Law and the right to collective defense have been forcibly passed, severely undermining the fundamental ideas enshrined in the Constitution of Japan. In the meantime, a new social security system needed to deal with the rising rate of poverty and aging population does not seem to be emerging. Another challenge is posed by the increasing tension among East Asian countries. In this coming July, the Abe administration will pass a series of security laws that will enable Japan to execute the right of collective defense abroad. The ultimate aim of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) is to amend the Peace Constitution after the Upper House election next year. We believe we are in a critical period this year for the future of Japan.

We as the young generation have to be the ones to think about these issues and present a realistic vision. We ask all the liberals across the conventional political spectrum to form a united front to protect Japan’s tradition of liberal democracy. We also urge each and every member of the society to face up to this task, think through the issues at hand, and take actions. The actions each of us takes in the coming months will become a shield that will protect freedom and democracy in Japan.

THIS IS WHAT DEMOCRACY LOOKS LIKE.

WE ARE SEALDs.
CONSTITUTIONALISM

We demand politics which respects constitutionalism.

We demand politics based on constitutionalism. Constitutionalism requires that all political decisions be made in accordance with the constitution and its protection of liberty and rights. It places strict limits to the power of the government so that individual liberty and rights will not be violated by the state power. These principles are absolutely essential to modern democratic states. Many democracies including Japan are founded on them.

The current administration has made a series of political decisions which deny the tradition of constitutionalism in this country and the defining principles of the Constitution of Japan. Primary examples are the steamrolling of the State Secrecy Law in December 2013 and the constitutional reinterpretation by the cabinet’s decision allowing the exercise of the right to collective defense in 2014. Moreover, the LDP's draft of constitutional amendment published in 2012 put the public order and civil duty before individual freedom and rights. LDP's vision of the constitution is the complete opposite of constitutionalism that controls state power in order to protect freedom and rights of individuals.

Needless to say, we are not denying the possibility of constitutional amendment itself. Today, new social issues abound such as the rights of sexual minority and different life styles. Constitutional amendment regarding these issues should be publicly discussed and practiced.

The tradition and history of the Constitution of Japan that have protected our freedom and rights for 70 years after the war should not be underestimated. Thus, we oppose the LDP's draft of constitutional amendment as well as the current government that fundamentally denies the very principles of constitutionalism. With a view to protecting the fundamental ideas of the Constitution of Japan and its tradition, we stand for politics founded upon constitutionalism which respects individual freedom and rights.
SOCIAL SECURITY

We demand politics that provides for the social security of all people in Japan through sustainable and just growth as well as fair distribution.

We demand politics that provides for the social security of all people in Japan through sustainable and just growth as well as fair distribution. Today, Japan has an unprecedented rate of poverty, which manifests itself in situations like the homelessness of temporary workers, job scarcity, and the predicaments of the working poor. Since Japan has traditionally relied on the role of corporations and families in providing for citizen’s well-being more than other developed countries, its social security system is in need of a drastic reform in the face of globalization and post-industrialization.

However, the current government has implemented fundamentally unbalanced strategies of growth that abandoned the impoverished as well as the middle class, aggravating the income gap and instability of employments. As a result of Abenomics, the rich has increased its wealth, while the middle class income has declined. In the realm of social security policies, the government has curtailed different aspects of the safety net such as public assistance for livelihood and nursing care insurance services. In addition to the expansion of non-regular employment, the Worker Dispatch Law was amended in such a way as to allow corporations to perpetuate worker’s status of dispatched labor indefinitely. The consumption tax will also be raised to 10 percent in April of 2017. If the consumption tax is increased without rebuilding the system of redistribution centered on social security, the wealth gap will continue to widen. What is urgently needed now is to ensure people’s lives through an enhanced social security system and stabilized employments. Problem of the “dark employers” who exploits workers and severely jeopardizes their lives has been hotly debated. The government has the responsibility to regulate such corporations to protect the workers’ well-being. In the long run, the stabilization of social security system and secured employments will not only protect the lives of citizens but also become a foundation upon which new economic growth will be built.

We demand economic policies which promote healthy, fair and sustainable growth by securing the full lives of citizens, rather than unbridled capitalism which widens
Keynote Address

the wealth gap at the cost of the weak. We oppose the current government’s economic policies that are on the verge of destroying the lives of so many citizens.

NATIONAL SECURITY

We demand peaceful diplomatic and national security policy based on dialogue and cooperation.

We demand peaceful diplomatic and national security policy based on international dialogue and cooperation. The territorial disputes and the conflicting views on history have been creating an increasing tension between Japan and neighboring nations of Asia. As the only nation that has suffered strategic nuclear attacks on civilian population and currently possesses the Peace Constitution, it is incumbent on Japan to share a practical vision of peace and take an initiative in constructing cooperative security system among East Asian nations. We believe such a contribution to the global society will establish Japan’s security.

With the ultimate aim of constitutional amendment, the current administration has changed the fundamental tenets of Japan’s national security policies by allowing the exercise of the right to collective defense, deregulating the weapons export policy and revising the Japan-US security guideline. While Japan and China have different political systems, inflaming tensions with such an important economic partner is irresponsible. Prime Minister’s visit to the Yasukuni Shrine has profoundly aggravated diplomatic relations, primarily worrying East Asian nations and also causing the US Department of Defense to profess “disappointment”. Such diplomatic and security policies are at loggerheads with the international and UN efforts to prohibit wars and undermine the global community’s trust in Japan. In order to ensure Japan’s realistic and sustainable national security, it is crucial to make more efforts to ease tensions with neighboring nations and establish enduring measures for the confidence-building. For example, Japan should tap into its status as the only nation to have suffered strategic nuclear attacks to take initiatives to work towards nuclear disarmament and ultimate abolition of nuclear arms altogether. In addition, Japan should promote international cooperation in non-military fields such as environment, development aids and disaster recovery assistance. Regarding the recognition of historical events, establishing a common understanding with the countries involved is essential.
Having established pacifism and liberal democracy on the basis of massive losses of the World War II and the grave mistakes of colonialism and aggression, Japan has a strong responsibility as well as the potential to lead disarmament and democratization in the world, and particularly in East Asia. We demand peaceful diplomatic and national security policies based on dialogue and cooperation.

**Toward a Unity of Liberals.**

We believe it is absolutely essential for opposing the current government to establish a unity of opposition parties and its supporters who share liberal values such as constitutionalism, social security and peace diplomacy. This unity will create a new political culture which encourages citizen’s political participation and revitalizes representational democracy.

For instance, in the last election of the House of Representatives, the LDP acquired 80 percent of the seats in the Diet, even though they won only 20 percent of all votes. This means the combined votes for the opposition parties were far more than the votes the LDP has earned. These facts show that it is eminently possible for us to reestablish liberalism in politics if different strands of opposition join hands.

Unfortunately, the unity of the oppositions to counter the current government is not yet realized. In 2014, however, the progressive parties in Okinawa have formed an alliance to oppose the building of a new US base in Henoko, defeating LDP candidates in all districts. We must learn a lesson from this historic result.

SEALDs does not support a particular party. However, we strongly hope for the emergence of an inclusive platform for the different types of liberals, which upholds the values of constitutionalism, redistribution and peace diplomacy. This platform is the condition urgently needed to protect a free and democratic Japan, and we propose it as a realistic vision for the opposition.

(The source: The statement of SEALDs’ HP)