

Japan P.E.N. Club Statement

The government should appoint all six scholars recommended by the Science Council of Japan as members.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's recent refusal to appoint some members of the Science Council of Japan (SCJ) is a violation of academic freedom and a violent behavior that undermines freedom of speech, expression, thought and belief. We have been watching closely from the beginning what lies behind these decisions and how the SCJ and academia will deal with them.

In 2016, under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga, the Prime Minister's Office refused to grant membership to the SCJ. In 2017, the Prime Minister's Office required the submission of a list of names of more than 105 members to be replaced. Furthermore, in 2018, the government drastically overturned the government's previous view that "the prime minister's appointment is only a formality" and said, "can't go so far as to say that someone has a duty to be appointed as recommended" based on the prime minister's right to command and supervise public officials.

These moves, which have recently become clear, have been carried out by the government without any deliberation in the Diet or any social debate, and are the very method by which the government distorts politics by arbitrary interpretations of laws and personnel appointments behind the scenes. Mr. Abe 's government has already been strongly criticized by the public for the security act and for the extension of the retirement age of public prosecutors. We are dismayed that this is almost the first job of the new Suga administration.

The Japan Pen Club has asked Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga to disclose the reasons for not appointing the six, and if he is unable to do so, to appoint them immediately.

In addition, this incident is related to the reason of the foundation of the SCJ, which started from the reflection of the prewar and wartime situations in which academics were subordinate to the government and caused great sacrifices, and in turn affects the freedom, independence, and mission of Japanese academia. The term members of the SCJ work as public servants in a broad sense, but most of all, "All public officials are servants of the whole community and not of any group thereof." (Article 15, paragraph 2 of the Constitution of Japan).

We hope that the people concerned and individual members of the SCJ will take a firm stand on this principle and deal with this issue based on the "belief that science is the foundation of a cultural nation" of the SCJ Law.

October 8th,2020

Shinobu Yoshioka

President

The Japan P.E.N. Club