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Japan near bottom in gender equality index

Japan ranked 91st out of 128 countries in the World Economic Forum's annual ranking of gender-equal countries presented on Thursday, the lowest ranking among all high income countries except for South Korea and five Middle Eastern countries.

The Global Gender Gap Index 2007, presented by the Swiss-based think tank World Economic Forum in collaboration with Harvard University and University of California, Berkeley, compared four areas of equality: economic participation and opportunity, access to education, political representation and health including life expectancy.

While Japan scored high in education and health areas, the gender income gap, the lack of women in legislation, management and parliament and ministerial positions brought Japan's score down to 0.645, where 1 means total equality and 0 total inequality.

Four Nordic countries, Sweden, Norway, Finland and Iceland once again topped the rankings, while the highest ranking Asian country was the Philippines, ranked 6th for the second year in a row. The United States, the world's leading economy, was ranked 31st, down from 23rd in 2006.

The six high income countries ranking below Japan were Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, but also Asian neighbor South Korea. China beat Japan by nearly 20 spots, ranked 73rd.

The index covers over 90% of the world's population, but does not include North Korea in its rankings.

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