

## Japanese women still hitting a glass and bamboo ceiling in the boardroom

By NATSUKO FUKUE

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Japan ranks 31st out of 35 countries in terms of the percentage of female board of directors, falling below Jordan, Oman and Kuwait, a U.S.-based nonprofit group said Tuesday.

According to the latest report by Corporate Women Directors International, there are only 17 women among 1,198 directors in large Japanese companies.

The group surveyed the top 100 companies in Japan based on the value of their shares in the index used by the Financial Times. The newspaper picked the 100 firms.

Those that have female directors on their boards include Sony, Shiseido, Asahi Breweries, Hitachi and Mitsui. However, 84 top-ranked firms, including Toyota, do not have even one female director.

"The glass ceiling in boards of directors remains in Japanese large companies," Irene Natividad, chairwoman of CWDI, told reporters in Minato Ward, Tokyo.

She called it progress that the percentage of female directors increased to 1.4 in 2009 from 0.2 in 1998, but "it's a pathetically low number."

Natividad noted the scarcity of female directors can be partly attributed to the culture and the structure of corporate boards here. Unlike many overseas companies whose boards include outside directors, many of the directors at Japanese companies have been promoted from within.

This trend is opposite to what is occurring in the U.S., she said.

"(In the U.S.), the larger the company, the more likely they are to have women on boards because their exposure to (the) consumer public is greater. But in Japan, midsize companies tend to have more woman on boards," Natividad said.

"It's shameful to have this low number," Aiko Okawara, chairwoman of JC Comsa Co. and a former panel member under the Cabinet Office's Gender Equality Bureau, said.

"In (Japan's) corporate world, women in management (account for) about 10 percent. So we have to make a great improvement."

Mariko Bando, president of Showa Women's University, said: "It's not even a glass ceiling. It's a bamboo barrier," indicating Japanese women are not even included as a core workforce and remain on the outside from the get-go.

It is time for large Japanese companies to include women if they want to be globally competitive in the current economic crisis, Natividad said.

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