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### Leadership guru says women can find new ways to break open glass ceiling

By Alison Brady

LOS ANGELES (Kyodo) It isn't easy for women to climb the corporate ladder in the United States, but in Japan, the so-called glass ceiling has been nicknamed the "concrete ceiling," says Hiroko Tatebe, a business leader and founding director of the Global Organization for Leadership and Diversity. Hiroko Tatebe



Tatebe, who moved to the United States as a young woman, says even if Japanese women face difficulties advancing among the male-dominated business elite, they can view a global model for success and try not to copy men's way of doing business.

Tatebe said her experience as director, vice president and treasurer of Dai-Ichi Kangyo Bank of California helped foment the creation of GOLD.

GOLD's inaugural event in Los Angeles was attended by more than 200 people. Attending the event titled 21st Century Women Leaders: Building Bridges Across the Pacific, were Sumiko Iwao, a professor of social psychology at Keio University; Debbie Howard, president of Japan Market Resource Network; and Jack Kyser, senior vice president and chief economist of the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation.

"When I worked for Dai-Ichi Kangyo, I was constantly bridging business and culture," Tatebe said in an interview. "After I quit, I realized what a passion I had for bicultural relations -- especially between Japan and the U.S."

The GOLD symposium aims to develop global leaders and create business and civic communities that will make use of individual talents, regardless of gender or background, by developing mentoring relationships among female leaders around the globe, starting with Japan and the U.S., according to the organization's Web site.

Events at the symposium taught women the qualities of strong business leaders. Despite being named Outstanding Business Woman of the Year by the Los Angeles chapter of Women in Business and being a founding member of Global Enhancement of Women's Executive Leadership, GOLD's sister organization in Tokyo, Tatebe said she "never 'broke' the glass ceiling."

"I just pushed it in certain ways without breaking it. You can push a little bit here and there, but you have to be patient," she said. "Japanese women really need to look at a global model for success in business to see what it takes and then they can teach men how it will work out."

"If women just try and copy the male model for business, it just won't work out," Tatebe added, referring to the long hours, obligatory after-work drinking with coworkers and bosses, and little family or vacation time that has become the model for life as a Japanese businessman.

"That doesn't mean we need to entirely throw the male model out, we just need to adapt it," she said.

Tatebe insists that the lessons taught by GOLD are applicable to businesspeople of both sexes in Japan's changing business world.

"Nowadays, both men and women in Japan have to find their own individual approach in a corporation," she said.

Marcia Bencala, vice president of marketing and planning for Hitachi Global Storage Technologies Inc., told the audience she was excited at the prospects for women in these changing times.

"I feel that today we are all participating in a critical turning point in the history of Japan."

3 A symposium promoting leadership in Japanese women is also encouraging further scrutiny of gender relations in Japan.

Recent remarks made by Health, Labor and Welfare Minister Hakuo Yanagisawa likening women to "child-bearing machines," along with Japan's poor ranking in recent gender equality studies among its industrialized peers conducted by the United Nations and World Economic Forum, have shown the world a darker side of Japanese society.

Additionally, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's refusal to acknowledge the Japanese government's involvement in the forced sexual servitude of thousands of "comfort women" during the war has led some critics to suggest such ideas could only be tolerated in a society troubled by gender equality.

Tatebe refuses to let a minister's careless remarks sidetrack her mission.

"I regret his statements, but at the same time I'm glad people are talking about these issues," she said. "Japan has to be prepared to discuss women's issues, and it is a great time right now to address what is required of global leaders."