

bimonthly



Buraku Liberation News

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January 1997

No.94

Toward the 50th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration for Human Rights and the 30th Anniversary of the BLRI

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In starting the activities of the Buraku Liberation Research Institute for 1997, I would like to review what has been done in 1996 for the elimination of discrimination and the enhancement of human rights, and present our basic subjects.

1. What has been done in the international community:

In 1996, many approaches have been taken around the world towards the enhancement of human rights. These include:

1) The United Nations designated 1996 as the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty calling for a complete eradication of poverty through joint efforts of the

international community.

Currently, there are about one billion destitute people in the world living under conditions where their basic human needs, such as clothing, diet, and housing, are not satisfied. They are also deprived of educational and vocational opportunities that might otherwise help them tap and develop their human potential.

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We should not overlook the fact that poverty and inequality that have brought about the emergence of fundamentalism and intensified ethnic conflicts taking place in many parts of the world.

2) In June 1996, the second UN Conference on Human Settlements (HABITAT II) was held in Istanbul, Turkey. The conference acknowledged that over-population has been a worldwide phenomenon in large cities accelerating the expansion of slum areas.

The conference also stressed that various social problems including poverty, unemployment, prevalence of disease, deprivation of children's right to study, and child labor concentrated in slum areas have caused social instability and disintegration.

To eradicate the root-cause of these problems, the conference recognized that the "right to housing is a human right."

It also agreed that central governments, local governments, private companies, civil organizations, and community-based organizations should join together to build communities where there are adequate housing, health and medical services, additionally assuring education and employment.

Japanese NGOs sent delegates to the conference, including those working for the restoration from the devastation brought by the Great Hanshin Earthquake, and representatives of the Buraku Liberation League and the International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR).

They shared their experiences and current conditions, and deepened mutual understanding with other participants from

around the world.

3) In August 1996, the "World Congress against Sexual Exploitation of Children for Commercial Purposes" was held in Stockholm, Sweden. Today, children in Asia and Africa are exposed to serious abuse.

They are victims of human trafficking, pornography, prostitution, and organ transplants. For many years, European, American and Japanese men have traveled to these regions to exploit child prostitution. In addition, local male adults also buy children for prostitution.

Facing the aggravated situation, to completely eradicate child prostitution, the conference resolved to reinforce the international monitoring network, and bring those involved under stricter punishment.

4) The Nobel Peace Prize for 1996 was awarded to Bishop Carlos Belo and Mr. Jose Ramos-Horta who have been committed to the resistance movement in East Timor.

As is widely known, East Timor had long been under the colonial rule of Portugal. In 1974 when the progressive government was formed in Portugal, the country put an end to its colonial rule over East Timor.

It was followed by the growing clamor for independence among the East Timorese, leading to the proclamation of independence as the Democratic People's Republic of East Timor in November 1975.

In July 1976, however, the Indonesian government dispatched its military to East Timor and began an occupation. This was accompanied by wide-ranging oppression to crush the independence movement.

Since then, the Indonesian government



has remained in East Timor, ignoring the denunciation of the international community, including the U.N.

Under these circumstances, the Nobel Peace Prize for this year was awarded to those who have persistently worked for the independence of East Timor, calling for the withdrawal of Indonesian troops and self-determination of the people for their future.

5) On 10 December 1996, the unveiling ceremony of the Hyongpyong monument was held in Chinju City, South Korea, to commemorate the Hyongpyong movement's fight against discrimination toward the Paekchong people, Korean out-castes. The Buraku Liberation League and the BLRI sent delegates to the ceremony (Please see the next story).

2. What has been done in Japan:

In Japan, we have made advancements towards the solution of human rights issues in 1996.

1) The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination became effective in Japan on January 14, 1996. This is a fruit of our campaign over the past 20 years calling for Japan's ratification of the Convention. Further efforts are needed to make the Convention widely understood and substantially implemented.

2) Towards the enactment of the Fundamental Law for Buraku Liberation, we achieved some important progress in 1996.

On May 17, the Consultative Council on

Regional Improvement Measures submitted a proposal regarding the new basic policies towards the solution of the Buraku problem.

Acknowledging the fact that serious discrimination against Buraku people still exists, and respecting the spirit of the report previously made by the Dowa Policy Council in 1965, the proposal considers a complete solution as the international obligation of Japan, and emphasizes the importance in taking further steps including legislative measures.

On June 5, the Project Team on Human Rights and Discrimination of the ruling coalition concluded the following three proposals to be submitted to the cabinet.

These include:

① The government will study the legislative measures for the promotion of education and enlightenment in order to eliminate deep-rooted discrimination in the consciousness of citizens.

② There are still quite a few human rights violations inflicted on Buraku people. Towards a solution, the government will study a new system, including legislative measures.

③ The government will seek legislative measures by studying the remaining subjects, the financial background of local governments, without interfering in the achievements of the measures up to the present.

On July 26, the Cabinet made a conclusion that the government will legislate financial measures for not more than five years to continue some infrastructure projects.



Kenzo Tomonaga

photo by the Kaiho Shimibun

Regarding legislative measures for the promotion of education and enlightenment and for the relief of victims of human rights violations, the project team decided on September 25 to request the cabinet to introduce a bill designed for these two measures and put it on the agenda of the next Diet session.

On December 13, the Law for the Promotion of Human Rights Protection was passed in the Upper and Lower Houses. The law was enacted in conformity with article 14 of the Japanese constitution.

It stipulates that measures should be taken, including legislation, for human rights education & enlightenment within 2 years and for the relief measures within 5 years.

The ordinances aiming at the elimination of all forms of discrimination and the establishment of human rights have been enacted in 450 municipalities while the declarations have been adopted by 900 municipalities.

8) The referendum on whether to support the continued presence of US bases in Okinawa was held in the prefecture. It is recognized

that 75% of the US military facilities in Japan are concentrated in Okinawa, which constitutes a structural discrimination against people in Okinawa.

4) The new Law on Ainu People is gradually making advancement towards enactment. In April 1996, the 'Consultation Group of Knowledgeable People regarding the Utari Welfare Measures,' a private consultative body to the Chief Cabinet Secretary, concluded the report stressing the importance of the enactment of the new Law on Ainu People for the promotion of respect for their unique language and culture.

5) As a result of a persistent campaign by HIV victims and their supporters, it was finally established that the pharmaceutical companies, the Ministry of Health and Welfare, and medical societies are responsible for drug transmitted HIV. Those involved have been prosecuted.

In March, the 'Leprosy Prevention Law' permitting the isolation of patients was finally abolished, a long-awaited achievement.

6) Students who will graduate from high school in 1997 are to use a uniform application form for employment. In the past, students were required to state their permanent domiciles, indicating family origin, and personal data of their family members in a resume when applying for employment; this practice led to employment discrimination against Buraku people.

3. Human rights situation in the world and in Japan:



As stated above, Japan and other countries have made some progress towards the elimination of discrimination and the establishment of human rights in 1996.

However, ethnic conflicts have continued in many parts of the world. According to an announcement made by UN officials, 20 countries are currently under civil war, causing many casualties and refugees. Most victims are children, women, and the elderly.

According to recent news reports, numerous Rwandan refugees in Zaire who have been dying from starvation need an emergency relief.

The Asia-Pacific region is not exempt from these tragic incidents. Civil wars involving ethnic conflict have long plagued Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, inflicting great suffering on the people.

The Indonesian government has held East Timor under occupation despite the condemnation repeatedly aroused at home as well as in the international community.

In Myanmar, the democratic movement led by Aung San Suu Kyi is continually suppressed by the military regime.

In India, opposing the 'reservation system' in favor of the Untouchables (Dalit), landlords and those from the upper caste continue to attack villages of the Untouchables in many parts of the country.

The human rights situation in the developed countries remains serious. In Europe, the neo-Nazi groups are becoming more active, while in the U.S. some groups openly advocate the segregation of non-Europeans.

Behind the growth of these movements, there are the increasing difficulties in the lives of people and the accumulating

discontent brought by high unemployment rates, sharp cutbacks in welfare programs, and the arbitrary review over affirmative action.

In Japan, similar phenomena have been emerging. Discrimination incidents take place more frequently in many places. Some people never stop discriminatory practices, disregarding the advice or persuasion of people around them.

Scribbling with malicious intentions is increasing. Some graffiti state; "Kill all Buraku people," and "Koreans, go back to Korea!"

'Bullying' still occurs among school children, while homeless people are sometimes attacked by youth groups.

Facing strong and persistent opposition from discriminatory Diet members, the civil law has not yet been amended to admit the option of adopting the maiden name on the marriage registration or to eliminate the discriminatory clauses denying the right of inheritance to illegitimate children.

Regarding the issue of 'military sex slavery', the Japanese government failed to fulfill its legal responsibility in the 50th anniversary of the war's end. The state of Japan has not yet articulated an apology or offered due compensation to the victims.

Moreover, some reactionary blocks try to erase the story of military sex slavery from school textbooks.

In April 1996, action was brought against Mitsubishi Motors of America for their practices of sexual harassment. The incident is not only a matter involving Mitsubishi Motors alone but also a sign of the discriminatory climate prevailing in all Japanese companies.



4. Challenges we face:

Reflecting upon the current situation inside and outside the country, I propose the following actions that we need to take for the establishment of human rights.

1) Before anything else, we must intensify our efforts to solve the problems in Japan.

Among other things, we have to work hard to make rapid advancement towards the enactment of the Fundamental Law for Buraku Liberation.

To be specific, we should achieve the enactment of a new law for the infrastructure projects as well as the laws for human rights education & enlightenment, relief of victims of human rights violations.

Withdrawal of the US bases from Okinawa should be realized as early as possible, while the industrial and economic conditions of Okinawa should be improved so that Okinawa achieves development without dependence on the military bases.

The new Law on Ainu People should be enacted so that the Ainu people are considered indigenous people, their unique language and culture are respected, and their lives are improved while enjoying equal opportunities in education and employment.

To establish human rights for the foreign permanent residents, it has been sought to delete the nationality clauses from qualifications for employment at local governments, and to open the door to them in local elections.

The scandal with Ricoh Lease, an office equipment leasing company which refused a non-Japanese to be a guarantor in the contract to lease a photocopier, symbolizes



*Gathering for the 48th anniversary of
the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
in Osaka on December 10, 1996*

the racial prejudice that is entertained by many other private companies in Japan.

To eliminate the gender-based discrimination against women and to guarantee the human rights of all children, the civil law should be immediately amended to provide an option to adopt the maiden name on a marriage registration and to admit the right to inheritance of illegitimate children.

To eliminate the discrimination against women in employment, the Equal Employment Opportunity Law needs a radical change for improvement.

To solve the problem of 'bullying' among children, it is required to provide children with the optimum conditions of society, to guarantee the right to freely express their opinions, and to terminate extremely severe competition in examinations.

2) We should be more involved in improving the human rights conditions in the Asia-Pacific region.

While the region is achieving rapid



industrial development, it faces various human rights problems. In respect to the regional mechanism to guarantee human rights in the region, we are far behind other regions in the world.

For the improvement of the human rights situation in the region, we need to develop solidarity at the regional level through consolidating our tie-up with organizations, including the Asia-Pacific Human Rights Information Center, or Hurights Osaka, established in Osaka in December 1994, and the IMADR, which is in the process of forming the IMADR Asian Committee.

Japan is the world's biggest donor country for Official Development Assistance. We need to reinforce the monitoring mechanism to see if the aid is properly used for the elimination of racism and the establishment of human rights in recipient countries.

3) It is also important for us to take advantage of international human rights standards to improve the human rights situation in Japan.

For this, it is necessary to promote public understanding and fully implement the international conventions that Japan has acceded to.

These include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial

Discrimination, etc.

It is a serious matter of concern that only a few words were mentioned about the human rights situation of children who are subject to social segregation, in the country report on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Child that the Japanese government submitted to the UN in May 1996.

The government will shortly conclude the country reports on the implementation of both International Covenants and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

The reports should be examined by NGOs, followed by the preparation of the counter-reports raising challenges and proposing solutions. Each counter-report should be presented before the relevant UN committee members.

In addition, we also need to urge the government to withdraw the reservations that it has made at the accession to the International Covenants and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and to enter into other conventions that Japan has not yet concluded.

These include two optional protocols to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (one is for the access to individual reporting of cases of human rights abuses, and the other is for the abolition of the death penalty), and the International Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

5. The UN Decade for Human Rights Education:



The UN Decade for Human Rights Education will soon step into its third year.

In Japan, with the approach made by civil organizations including the Buraku Liberation League, the government has created a promotion committee headed by the prime minister. The drawing up of a Program of Action is now under preparation by the committee.

At the local level, the Osaka Prefectural and City governments, Sakai City, Fukuoka Prefectural and City governments have created promotion committees headed by the governors or mayors, and started the preparation of the programs.

We must approach the central government to make the programs substantial, to set aside enough budget to implement the program, and rearrange the legal system.

At the local level, we need to approach other local governments for creation of promotion committees, preparation of a Program of Action, allocation of a budget, and the rearrangement of ordinances.

Approach to the private sectors is also important. Private companies, religious organizations, labor unions, democratic organizations, legal circles, universities, and the mass-media are required to prepare for the promotion of the UN Decade for Human Rights Education, and to take action according to programs that they plan.

6. Towards the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the 30th anniversary of the BLRI:

The world will celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration on

Human Rights in 1998.

To commemorate the anniversary, we will look back at the past 50 years to define what we have achieved and what we need to improve for the enhancement of human rights.

We will analyze the human rights picture around the world and determine the course we should take.

The year 1998 will also give us a good chance to promote a wider recognition of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and other international human rights standards and lead the trend towards the establishment of human rights.

An international conference, focusing the UN Decade for Human Rights Education, is expected to be held in Osaka, Japan, in 1988 to accelerate the implementation of the Program of Action both locally and internationally.

We will have the 30th anniversary of the foundation of the BLRI in 1998. It is necessary for us to develop our research activities by accumulating the achievements in the past.

As to our orientation in research, we should keep in mind contributions toward the enhancement of human rights by the elimination of all forms of discrimination with international viewpoints, while placing the solution of the Buraku problem as a main subject.

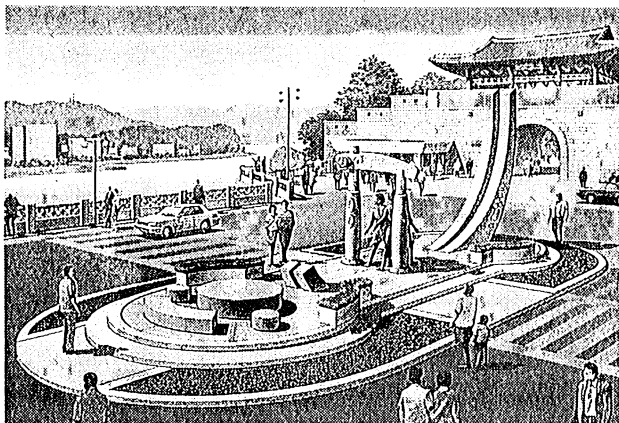
We also need to deepen cooperation with other private sectors and local governments, and to establish the International Human Rights University, which we have been proposing since 1988.



The Hyongpyong Monument

Completed in Chinju, South Korea

by Nobuki Fujimoto, BLRI



*Post card of the Hyongpyong Monument
produced by the Hyongpyong Association*

An unveiling ceremony of the Hyongpyong Monument was held on 10 December 1996 in Chinju City, in the Southern part of South Korea.

After a successful fund raising campaign, in commemoration of the Hyongpyong movement, the monument was constructed by the Hyongpyong Association, consisting of people mostly from Chinju where the movement originated, and including businessmen and researchers.

The Hyongpyongsa was established in 1923 to liberate Paekjong, the then counterpart of the Buraku people in Korea, from discrimination. Its movement was active until the organization was disintegrated in 1935 due to intensified Japanese colonial rule.

BLRI sent a delegation to the ceremony led by Prof. Sueo Murakoshi, chairperson of

the BLRI, to jointly celebrate the ceremony.

The delegation was composed of 17 people, many of whom are BLL members, including Mr Masato Takahashi, Director of the Financial Committee of the BLL.

The Levelers Association, the original organization of the BLL, had once forged solidarity with the Hyongpyongsa. In addition, both the BLL and BLRI have been in communication with the Hyongpyong Association in the past several years.

The monument has been constructed in front of Chinju Castle while a small plaque has been placed on a hedge just in front of the Chinju Theater, where the foundation ceremony of the Hyongpyongsa was held in 1923.

The ceremony was celebrated by 400 people, mostly from Chinju and nearby towns, with a traditional dance performance and congratulatory addresses delivered by Prof. Murakoshi and the U.S.-based Prof. Soon Man Rhim, the Vice President of the International Movement against All Forms Discrimination and Racism (IMADR), along with the mayor of Chinju and a member of Congress.

Right after the monument was unveiled, it was donated by the association to the city so that the historical monument would become a common property of the citizens.



It is said that discrimination against Paekjong people has been lessened especially after the Korean War (1950-53), during which family registration records were burned. As a result, it has become hard to trace the descendants of Paekjong.

At a series of ceremonial events on December 10, Mr Jangha Kim, the president of the Hyongpyong Association said, "The Hyongpyong movement aimed at the elimination of discrimination against people in the lowest social class, and was a human rights movement seeking for the human dignity and establishment of an equal society. The monument has been completed by the joint efforts of many people who praise and

try to succeed its spirit."

The association set the date of the ceremony with such a view, the day when the UN adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights forty-eight years ago.

Previous to the ceremony on the day, the association sponsored the "96 Chinju Conference on Human Rights", where issues of discrimination against handicapped people, elderly, women, and single parents were discussed.

Prof. Joong-Seop Kim, one of the major members of the association, said that they would like to develop Chinju City into a sending station of human rights.

A Detective Agency under Investigation on Suspicion of Their Discriminatory Inquiry

On 6 December 1996, the Osaka Prefectural government entered a private detective agency based in Osaka City and made an investigation on suspicion of violating the Prefectural Ordinance to Regulate Personal Background Investigation Conductive to Buraku Discrimination, allegedly by reporting to their client that a job applicant (of whom the client asked to investigate the background) came from a Buraku area; this was done even without the client's request for such an inquiry.

The investigation was first conducted in accordance with the ordinance since its enactment in 1985.

According to the Osaka Prefectural

government, in November a retailer based in the prefecture requested the agency to inquire into the background of job applicants, including educational and employment history.

In reporting the outline of the results to the client by phone, the agency informed that a woman was from a Buraku area. Such discriminatory inquiry was disclosed by an anonymous letter sent to the BLL.

In response to the question of the Osaka Prefecture, the agency denied the suspicion. As a result, the prefecture decided to continue to look into the fact by directly interviewing the staff involved in the inquiry.

The ordinance urges detective agencies



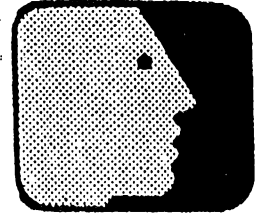
not to inquire and report whether any person comes from a Buraku area, in order to avoid Buraku discrimination in marriage,

employment and other social life.



Buraku Problem Q & A (15)

Literacy Classes in Osaka



Q

At present how many people are studying at literacy classes ?

A

While up-dated nationwide statistics are not available, the Board of Education of Osaka Prefecture made a first survey in 1996 on how many literacy classes are being organized in Osaka prefecture, in cooperation with the Board of Education of Osaka cities and organizations related to literacy classes.

According to the results, as of March 1996, 120 classes were held with a total number of 3,663 students, including 43 classes in Buraku areas, 36 classes at community halls, and 22 classes at civic voluntary organizations.

While women constitute 78% of the entire students, half of the students are foreign nationals, including Korean residents.

Aside from these literacy classes, about 2,000 adults are studying Japanese literacy at 10 night schools classes in Osaka.

Classes exclusively for foreign migrant workers are held in many places.

Literacy classes were originally designed for Buraku people who were unable to go to

school because of the poverty caused by discrimination. The illiteracy rate of Buraku people was much higher than that of non-Buraku people.

Under such circumstances, a voluntary literacy movement started at coal mining areas in Fukuoka Prefecture in 1963. The movement spread nationwide and developed into the present form.

While the majority of the students are women whose right to education has been seriously deprived compared to men, literacy instructors are teachers from elementary and junior high schools in the neighborhood, and staff of the community liberation halls. Most classes are regularly held in the evening once a week.

The class provides the students with self-awareness for Buraku liberation as well as literacy.

To our readers,

Buraku Liberation News would like to express our appreciation for your answers to our questionnaire attached to the last issue.

We have been in process of examining the answers in order to provide you with more useful information.