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ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Written statement submitted by the Japanese Workers' Committee for Human Rights (JWCHR), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[4 August 2006]

* Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/251 of 15 March 2006 entitled "Human Rights Council", all mandates, mechanisms, functions and responsibilities of the Commission on Human Rights, including the Sub-Commission, were assumed, as of 19 June 2006, by the Human Rights Council. Consequently, the symbol series E/CN.4/Sub.2/_ , under which the Sub-Commission reported to the former Commission on Human Rights, has been replaced by the series A/HRC/Sub.1/_ as of 19 June 2006.

** This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Title: Japanese Extremely High Tuition fee¹

All-Japan Federation of Student Unions is a national federation of student unions that are constituted of every student in each college or university or department. Approximately 160 students unions and 500,000 Students are its members.

High tuition fee is one of the biggest concerns for Japanese students.

Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights provides, “Higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education”. The Japanese government hasn’t accepted this, and have increased tuition fee. The tuition fee of national universities is 9.5 times, and that of private universities now is 3.5 times on average compared to 1975. Since the consumer price index of Japan has risen only 1.8 times during these 30 years, the high tuition fee critically violates human rights.

The total price which students pay in the first year as the tuition fee and admission fee of national universities exceeds 800,000 yen, while that of private universities exceeds 1,300,000 yen on average. It is 30% of the parents’ income for the private university students, causing one quarter of them to fall into debt. Our questionnaire to Japanese students shows that 92% of the students think the tuition fee is ‘expensive’, while only 0.7% thinks ‘suitable’ and 0.3% think ‘inexpensive’. The questionnaire shows that 42% think, “part time jobs are obstruction to their student lives.” Students are forced to cut down their cost of living. Board of students living apart from their parents has decreased 20% in ten years. Some students cannot pay the tuition fee and are forced to drop out.

The most serious problem is that there are many high school students and young people who cannot go to universities because of the high tuition fee. The questionnaire gathered many voices concerning the matter: “My family was so poor that my little sister couldn’t enter a university.” “Tuition fee of the medical department is extremely high, so I gave up my dream to be a doctor.” A survey to guidance counselors in high school showed that 70.7% of them think that restriction of family finances is severer than that of academic ability for entering university.

Learning is fundamental human rights and indispensable for human life. Income of students’ parents must not determine their occasion to go to universities. Japanese scholarship system is insufficient in the quality and quantity. Many students owe more than 5,000,000 yen for the scholarship when they graduate, making them anxious about the payment even in their school life. Taking the actual situation stated above into account, Japanese scholarship system is not sufficient enough to ease discrimination generated from the tuition fee. Only 5% of the whole students receive reduction of school tuition.

The Japanese government insists that “payment burden” must be equal between people who enter universities and those who do not, and that there is enough scholarship system and that they keep formal equality. However, the formal equality isn’t actually making

¹ All-Japan Federation of Student Unions also shares the view expressed in this statement

equal opportunity for Japanese students, as we see the circumstances of Japanese university students and high school students.

In the 21st century, making sustainable societies will surely be the universal fundamental issue. We have to overcome international disputes and environmental destructions. To cope with this issue, the higher education will become even more important. Japan, as one of the most developed countries in the world, must perform its duty to take the initiative in enriching higher education. The disbursement to the higher education from Japanese government is only 0.4% of Japanese GDP, which is a half as much as OECD average. If Japanese government improves this rate, the reduction of the tuition fee will surely be possible.

Only Republic of Rwanda, Madagascar, and Japan reserve the Article 13. We demand that the Sub-Commission make a greater effort to make Japanese government accept the Article as soon as possible to play an international role as one of the most developed countries.

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