



General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/HRC/4/NGO/83

8 March 2007

ENGLISH ONLY

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
Fourth session
Item 2 of the provisional agenda

IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 60/251 OF 15 MARCH 2006 ENTITLED “HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL”

Joint written statement* submitted by the Asia-Japan Women’s Resource Center (AJWRC), Japan Civil Liberties Union (JCLU), Japan Fellowship of Reconciliation (JFOR), Peace Boat, Shimin Gaikou Centre (Citizens’ Diplomatic Centre for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples), non-governmental organizations in special consultative status, and the International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR), a non-governmental organization on the Roster

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

[28 February 2007]

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

Overcoming “Marginalization” and “Invisibility” in Japan: Towards the Realization of a Multicultural Society Free of Prejudice and Discrimination

In Response to the Report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance on his Mission to Japan¹

The eradication of racial discrimination, racism, xenophobia and related intolerance, including ethnic discrimination and Buraku discrimination, is an important task for the international community in the 21st century, as re-affirmed at the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in South Africa in 2001. In this context, we believe that the report submitted by Mr. Doudou Diène, UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, to the Commission on Human Rights (E/CN.4/2006/16/Add.2) will serve as a test as to whether the Japanese society can re-examine itself, and the Government of Japan can take concrete measures toward solving these problems in the country.

◆ Overall evaluation of the report – A step toward overcoming “marginalization” and “invisibility,” and realizing a multicultural society

We welcome the report, recognizing that it is the first UN document to address racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia in Japan in a comprehensive way that deals not only with the legal aspects of these issues but also with their social and historical context.

Although some elements of the report may reflect an incomplete understanding of the details or be based on misconceptions, on the whole, it is a very valuable document because it emphasizes that there are clearly groups in Japanese society who have been rendered invisible or whose presence has been poorly recognized and that a multicultural society cannot exist without appropriate policies that acknowledge the social and historical context of these issues. This point is illustrated, for example, in the first recommendation (para. 74), which states: “The Government, at the highest levels, should officially and publicly recognize the existence of racial discrimination and xenophobia in Japanese society,” and that the government “should also officially and publicly recognize historical and cultural roots of racial discrimination and xenophobia in the Japanese society, and express in clear and strong terms its political will to combat it.” It continues: “It should be done by conducting a survey to find out the present conditions of each discriminated group in Japan.” It further states that, “Such a message will not only create the political conditions of combating discrimination and xenophobia at all levels of society, but also facilitate the promotion of the complex but profound process of multiculturalism in Japanese society.”

¹ 84 Japanese NGOs representing Ainu communities, Buraku communities, Okinawan communities, Korean residents in Japan and migrant communities (As of February 27, 2007), also share the views expressed in this statement.

The establishment of the nation-state, colonialism, and in recent years, neo-liberal globalization and the “war on terror” have left the Buraku people, the Ainu, the people of Okinawa, people and descendants of former Japanese colonies (Koreans and Chinese), foreigners and migrant workers from other Asian countries and from the rest of the world increasingly marginalized—they face harsh discrimination, their history has been buried, and they have been deprived of their distinct cultures. These socially invisible minorities have been kept apart from the majority, and the state has taken advantage of this split to implement its security policies and maintain its authority.

We bear in mind a remark made by Special Rapporteur Diène during the press conference at the end of his mission to Japan: “The submission of the report is not the goal. I want this to serve as an opportunity to help Japan move towards multiculturalism – this is what the end-goal is.” We hope that the Japanese government and other concerned actors will take the submission of this report to the UN as an opportunity to reaffirm the existence of “others” whose backgrounds differ from that of the majority, and to deepen their understanding of the conditions faced by minority groups, the underlying social, economic and political structures involved, as well as the history and distinct cultures of those groups.

◆ **We call on Japanese policymakers to implement the report’s recommendations and engage in dialogue with minority groups**

Taking the above into consideration, we demand that Japanese policymaking institutions – the government, local authorities, legislatures and the judiciary – enlighten themselves about the comprehensive meaning, recommendations and background of the report, and take all necessary measures to implement each of the recommendations under their respective mandates. At the same time, we believe it is important to ensure that minority groups are consulted in all phases of this process and that a commitment to publicly recognize the existence of racial discrimination is shown through action. It will be impossible to carry out any of the recommendations without accurately reflecting the point of view of minorities that have been marginalized and rendered invisible, and without re-examining Japanese society. We commend the Japanese government for receiving Special Rapporteur Diène’s mission, but its true value will only be realized when the government engages in dialogue and consultation with minority groups.

◆ **Calling for strengthening of partnerships between minorities and NGOs**

We believe it significant that the report ends with the following recommendation: “Groups that are discriminated should act in a spirit of solidarity between them, and support each others against causes, as a way to achieve a truly pluralistic society, where all are minorities are respected and have their place (para. 97).”

In light of recent conditions, we must take a clear stand against policies and incidents that promote racial discrimination, racism and xenophobia. We must make effective use of international human rights mechanisms, and focus not only on the effects of discrimination but also on the underlying social, economic and political structures and history, as we forge stronger partnerships between minority groups, as well as among

minority and majority groups. The Japanese government has begun drafting its third and fourth periodic reports due under the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination. Our immediate task is to demand the substantive participation of minorities and NGOs throughout the reporting process, from drafting to deliberation by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). At the same time, we must demand that the report reflect policies designed to implement the recommendations of Special Rapporteur Diène.

We thus call upon Japan's minority groups and individuals, as well as groups and individuals concerned about the issues of racial discrimination, racism and colonialism, to participate in a wide coalition to deepen their mutual understanding of the existence, history and current situation of historically marginalized and invisible minority groups, and to share their awareness of these issues.

Japanese society today is built on a lack of understanding of minorities, and neither the government nor members of the majority, who constitute the overwhelming part of society, can identify with the pain felt by discriminated groups. This threatens multiculturalism and promotes xenophobia, and, as a result, impairs the full functioning of democracy. We believe that only by understanding minorities and creating policies based on that understanding can Japanese society realize multiculturalism and fight xenophobia, and in so doing, take the first step towards overcoming a false democracy based only on the power of the majority.
