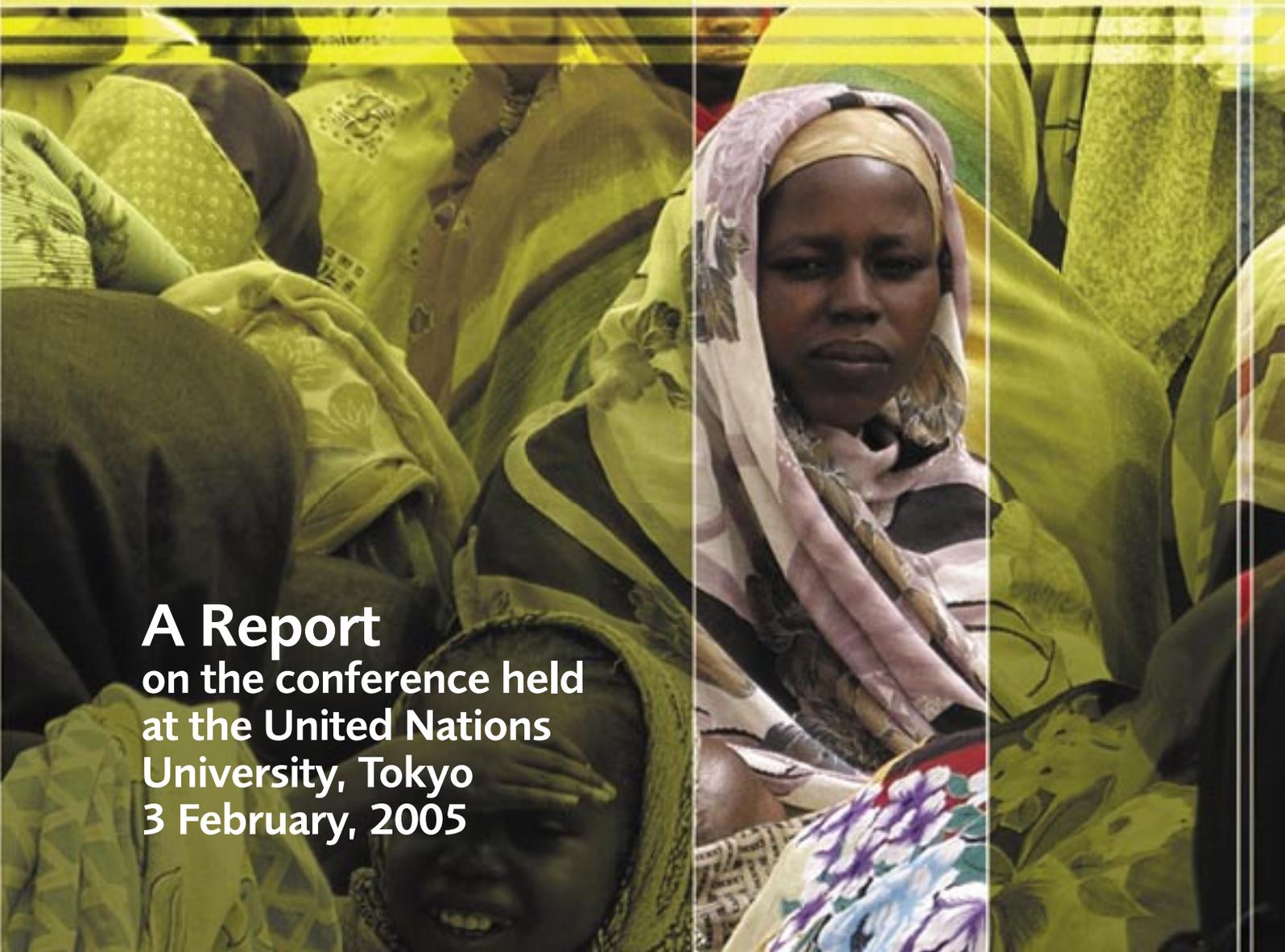


Bridging the Gap:

Involving Citizens'
Movements and NGOs
in the Democratic Process



A Report
on the conference held
at the United Nations
University, Tokyo
3 February, 2005



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Disclaimer

In the spirit of free and open discussion, the EU-UNU Tokyo Global forum invites the views of academics, NGOs, journalists, politicians, and representatives of international organizations. Participants do not necessarily agree with one another, but we believe that it is important to provide a forum for a frank exchange of views. The opinions and comments expressed at the conference and reproduced in this report do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the United Nations University or the European Union.

Preface

Hans van Ginkel

Rector, United Nations University



In 2001 the Delegation of the European Commission in Japan and the United Nations University started a series of conferences on issues that are relevant to Europe, Japan, and the United Nations. The European Union and the United Nations are close global partners and these annual conferences – which have addressed critical challenges related to international humanitarian assistance, post-conflict peace building, governance and children – illustrate some aspects of our global cooperation together. The subject that brought us together, with our Japanese networks, in February 2005 was “civil society”, and in particular: “how to involve citizen’s movements and non-governmental organizations in the democratic process?”

Although there is still no unanimously agreed definition of what civil society is, we all know that it exists, is viable and is gaining strength. In June of 2004, the Cardoso Commission, appointed by Secretary-General Kofi Annan as the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations-Civil Society Relations, issued its report on “civil society, the United Nations and global governance.” The Commission emphasized its belief that “constructively engaging with civil society is a necessity for the United Nations, not an option.”

Civil Society mediates state-citizen relations domestically and shapes the agenda of world affairs. A robust and independent civil society is an essential pillar of democratic states. It gives flesh and meaning to the concept of the United Nations: “We the peoples of the United Nations”. This is in line with UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan’s determination that “As long as I am Secretary-General, the United Nations as an institution will always place human beings at the centre of everything we do.”

Japanese NGOs are particularly active within the domestic borders, especially in issues such as the

protection of foreign workers’ rights and, in general, assisting minority groups. With the increasing involvement of Japan in international humanitarian assistance, Japanese NGOs are also, increasingly, reaching out. The activities in Afghanistan are one major and prominent example.

In the field of humanitarian assistance and development, the number of NGOs keeps growing. And the role of NGOs in conflict operations and in post-conflict situations has gained broad acceptance, not only because NGOs in conflict areas can be effective agents of transformation, but also because of the personal bravery of all those people who risk their lives by going to conflict stricken areas such as Afghanistan. The field of the natural environment, too, has demonstrated the fundamentally important role of NGOs.

NGOs offer new and important opportunities for citizen participation as additional forms of democratic expression and action. But there need to be mechanisms to ensure that NGOs can contribute to decision making. Governments need to establish open channels and processes where the voices of NGOs can be heard. The lack of trust that can often affect government/NGO relations comes from a sense of frustration that results from a gap between rhetoric and reality. This calls for governments to be honest, sincere and open about the decision making process so that NGOs will have a real opportunity to contribute to decision making as well as to effective action.

The conference proved to be an important exploration of the ways “civil society” is organized, the means it is using and the challenges it is facing. It considered examples of best practice in involving NGOs and citizens’ movements in the democratic process – practices that could also be recommended to NGOs the world over. ●

Preface

Bernhard Zepter

Ambassador and Head of the Delegation of the European Commission to Japan



The engagement of citizens in the democratic process is an issue to which the European Commission attaches great importance. The European Commission’s White Paper on Governance, published in 2001, recognized that the evolution of the European Union meant “moving from a diplomatic to a democratic process”. The Paper underlines therefore the urgent need to “generate a sense of belonging to Europe”. This is not an easy task. As former President Jacques Delors said, “One cannot fall in love with a Single Market”.

The White Paper was published in advance of the establishment of the Convention on the Future of Europe and there was a clear interaction between the two. As this Convention was assembled to produce a first draft of a Constitutional Treaty, its mandate included consultation as widely as possible with stakeholders across Europe. Academics, think tanks, and NGOs – as well as members of the general public – were all invited to submit comments to the Convention on what should be the future structure and political task of the European Union.

The Constitution will greatly simplify the distribution of power and substantially enhance the democratic legitimacy of the European integration process. This will lead to better interconnection between the Institutions and the European citizens and civil society.

The low turnout at last year’s European Parliament elections again shows how important it is to engage civil society in the integration process. European Commission President José Manuel Barroso is all too aware of this and he has placed special emphasis

on better communication with the citizens of the EU.

People-to-People contacts is the special theme of the exchange year currently underway between Japan and the EU. The 2005 EU-Japan Year of People-to-People Exchanges not only offers an opportunity to increase face-to-face contacts between Japanese and European citizens, but also to better facilitate civil society movements in the EU-Japan relationship.

2005 also marks the tenth anniversary of the Great Hanshin Awaji Earthquake. This tragic event was a turning point for Japanese NGOs, especially the volunteer movement in Japan. We now increasingly see Japanese NGOs playing a more active role in the decision-making process.

The EU-UNU Tokyo Global Forum: Bridging the Gap saw active participation from Japanese NGOs, both on the panel and in the audience. Conferences such as Bridging the Gap are an opportunity for NGOs and practitioners from the EU and Japan to exchange best practices, and for Japanese NGOs to meet and consult one another on their activities.

From the Japanese Government, we were pleased to welcome Ambassador Komano to the conference. Just three years after the low point of the 2002 Afghan Donor’s Conference when lawmakers and bureaucrats brought influence to exclude NGOs from attending the conference, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has created a special post dedicated to liaising with NGOs and Civil Society. It is important to engage citizens in the democratic process in order to ensure transparent and open government. ●

NGOs and Afghan Reconstruction

Kinichi Komano

Ambassador in charge of NGOs, Afghanistan Assistance Coordination and Human Security, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan



Before taking up my present assignment, I stayed for the period of two and half years in Kabul, supporting the efforts of the Afghan people for nation-building after 23 years of civil war and complete destruction. Based upon such experiences, I think I can better contribute to the deliberation of this Forum by explaining lessons I learnt in Afghanistan, to a possible extent, focusing on the Human Security dimension of the Afghan issues.

I would like to introduce a media report I read recently with great pleasure, to the effect that the Afghan government has decided to send medicines and fresh blood, together with some doctors and medical workers to Indonesia, in order to help those affected by the Sumatran earthquake and the ensuing tsunami in the Indian Ocean. Thus, Afghan people wanted to share a part, even though very small part of the joint efforts by the international community for extending help to the seriously affected peoples in the region.

Since Afghanistan herself still needs a great deal of assistance from the international community to rehabilitate and develop her own country, their donation is a nominal and symbolic one against a rush of pledges and aid from so many countries and peoples. However, it shows us several important things.

1. Now the Afghan people feel that they are an integral part of the international community and perceive that they cannot ignore the misfortunes occurring in the other parts of the world. This is remarkable, if we compare the Afghanistan as we see now with that of even 4 years ago under the Taliban regime.

2. The Afghan problem is not over yet. While the attention of the international community has shifted to the Sumatran earthquake and tsunami in the Indian Ocean, the Afghan people might have wished to tell the world that they still require the attention and support of

the international community in their efforts.

It is opportune and necessary to assess the achievement in Afghanistan and learn lessons for our future work there and use them in other areas. The results of the joint efforts of the Afghan people and the international community have already been bearing fruit on different ways, the culmination of which is the smooth and successful implementation of the Presidential Election last October, even though we have yet a long way to go.

I notice some interesting and important movements taking place through the Presidential Election, which seems to be the key to the success in the endeavours to establish democracy as a basis of the enduring peace, stability and prosperity of a country like Afghanistan.

The Presidential Election was the last but one phase of the political process of Afghanistan agreed upon in Bonn. Even one year ago, the election had been deemed a near impossible task under the prevailing circumstances in Afghanistan. The Taliban had pointedly announced its intention to disrupt the electoral process since Karzai was the puppet of the “occupying” forces and the election was to put rubber stamp on the anti-Islamic regime. They threatened the people not to register as voters, nor to go to the polling stations.

In addition to the security problems, there were no precedents in Afghanistan for the people to elect their political leader directly and the illiteracy rate is also very high. Dilapidated infrastructure such as roads and telecommunication system on the one hand, and mountainous landscape on the other, were additional obstacles to the preparations for the nation-wide election.

The last but not least problem was how to secure a free

and fair election. There are illegal and irregular militias in every part of the country. As the Ambassador of the lead nation in the DDR programme (Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration), I also did my best to push ahead this programme in order to contribute to the creation of an atmosphere conducive to a free and fair election by disarming the militias.

In spite of all the hard work by the Afghans and the international community, no one could stop being worried about the outcome of the election and many of us prayed for a good luck.

Finally, a miracle happened on the election day. It was the Afghan people who acted and went to the 5,000 polling centres all over the country. Over 70% of the registered voters participated, thus rejecting the threat posed by the Taliban. The Taliban simply could not act and disrupt the voting and counting process thereafter. President Karzai disclosed an impressive episode of a woman voter, in his speech of the Presidential Inaugural Ceremony. This woman appeared in a rural voting centre, showing two ballot cards in her hands. She wanted to vote for her pregnant daughter, too.

The official in the centre allowed her only one vote, explaining why. After accepting the explanation, and voting herself, she went and came back again to the polling centre just before the closing time, accompanying her daughter. Her daughter gave birth to a baby just a few hours before.

I have heard so many stories of this kind, of how enthusiastically the Afghan people cast their ballots. Most of them might not be aware what democracy is and what the election means.

Neither the opponents of the election such as the Taliban nor disputes on fraud cases among the presidential candidates could disrupt the electoral process, because of this action and presence of the people on the scene. It was a marvelous achievement.

Why did the people act? What did they want to demonstrate by taking action? These are important questions which we should ponder on.

My answer is as follows:

After a long period of civil war, extremism and poverty,

the Afghan people are really tired and sincerely want peace and stability for their country and for their future.

Here I tell you a short history of Afghanistan. After the withdrawal of the occupying Soviet troops, there was a chance of peace in Afghanistan. At that time, however, the international community (that is the Western bloc) had lost interest in Afghanistan after the collapse of the rival bloc. The Mojaheddin Government established after the Soviet withdrawal had been engaged in more devastation of Kabul because of the infighting among the groups of the coalition government. The Afghan people know this fact well and they might have thought that if they fail to grasp the chance of peace this time, they will never see another chance in their life. Since they hoped for peace and stability, that is the basis for their life and dignity, they acted and voted.

This is really a historical moment and a big achievement in Afghan history and also in the fight against terrorism. Real democracy is taking shape, irrespective of the people themselves clearly recognizing it or not.

All the efforts made so far after the establishment of the Provisional Government in December 2002, in the political process, rehabilitation and development efforts and security reform, are causing certain degree of change and transformation in the minds of the people and structure of the society, even though they are not strong enough and fragile in nature. The people started perceiving that Afghan society has been changing from the era of the rule of guns to that of the rule of law, and if they act, this trend could be irreversible.

If I am right in my assessment of the results of the presidential election, I think the goals of the work by the new Afghan government and the support by the international community from now on should be directed and focused on breeding and strengthening this spirit and aspiration of the people.

This is how to translate the will and aspiration of the Afghan people into reconstruction efforts in the country. In another word, how to institutionalize the people’s participation in the nation-building efforts in Afghanistan, is crucial to the success of the on-going

efforts in all aspects .

In this regard, I would like to make some suggestions.

Firstly, is that work could be better done by the Afghan people themselves. I have found some interesting phenomena in the preparatory process of the presidential election. Around 130,000 Afghan officials have been trained and mobilized to manage the voting and counting exercise and many of them had been employed in the registration work of the eligible voters before that.

As I mentioned earlier, in the registration process, the Taliban focused its attacks on electoral officials, including international staff. This had compelled the UN to change its policy and to rely more on national staff in the related work from then on.

At the same time with the training of national staff and the preparation work done by them, another exercise had been progressing, that was to educate the people on what an election is and how an election takes place. This work has been done mainly by the local people, due to their knowledge of the local situation and languages.

Furthermore, a local NGO has played a critical role in the observation and monitoring of the voting and counting process. Due to the difficult security situation in many parts of the country, international observer missions such as OSCE and EU, bi-lateral observer missions including Japan and international NGOs such as Asian Network for Free and Fair Elections could not cover the whole country. Under such circumstances, the newly-established local NGO called the Organization for Free and Fair Elections, supported in terms of training and finance by international NGOs, have made possible the training of over 2,000 volunteers and dispatched them to 100 districts (out of around 400) for observing and monitoring.

I could conclude from these facts that the Afghan people themselves had sensitised their fellow citizens on the meaning and importance of the election and encouraged them to act.

Secondly, is that work should be transferred to the

Afghan people. Afghanistan has produced the biggest number of refugees in the history of UNHCR. Now over 3 million out of 6 million Afghan refugees have come back to the country.

Mrs. Ogata, in her capacity as the Special Representative of the Prime Minister of Japan in Afghanistan Assistance proposed an initiative which has later been called the “Ogata Initiative” for supporting the permanent resettlement of the returnees to their places of origin. In this programme, two factors are important.

One is seamless transition. It often happens that emergency and humanitarian aid are not followed, in a timely fashion, by medium-and long term development aid due to the fact that different agencies are in charge. Under such circumstances, the targeted people might be left in the dark and compelled to leave and go back as refugees again. Therefore, there should not be any gap between two stages in aid efforts. This is very true for the aid efforts now taking place for the people affected by the Sumatran earthquake and following tsunami in the Indian Ocean.

Two is to cover the local people of the recipient community under the support programme. Local people and returnees tend to compete with each other for the limited resources in the area. Therefore, the aid programme should address both categories of people and must be an area-based and community-based approach including not only returnees but also the original local people.

Under the Ogata Initiative, Japan has selected Kandahar, Mazar-e Sharif and Jalalabad as priority areas in its aid programme for supporting the resettlement of the returnees.

Our experience so far under this initiative shows that, at the initial stage when the capacity of the local government is very limited, much reliance is placed on UN agencies and NGOs, especially international NGOs, which have accumulated experience and local knowledge having stayed and worked for the people during the period of civil war and the Taliban days.

In the process, local government and local NGOs have been gradually involved in the consultation and implementation of projects under the Initiative.

Our goal is to transfer the leadership role from the international community (UN agencies and international NGOs) to the local government and local people.

Thirdly, is that the community is the appropriate focus of efforts for empowerment and development.

The Human Security concept, which has been prepared by the UN Commission and co-chaired by Mrs. Ogata and Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen cannot be more rightly and adequately applied than to Afghanistan and those affected by the Sumatran earthquake and tsunami in the Indian Ocean.

For the purpose of human security, it is important to shed light on the vulnerable individuals and communities and help the protection and empowerment of these people and their communities.

In Afghanistan, even though we were compelled to start the work of re-establishing institutions and building capacity from scratch at all levels starting from the community to the central government, focus is rightly put on community level development, as per the Ogata Initiative, since 80% of the people live in the rural communities.

Out of 30,000 villages in the country, 6,000 have been already assisted financially and technically in terms of re-organizing community shura (local consultative mechanism), and provision of block money for the

implementation of priority projects identified by the local shura. This traditional consultative mechanism on the village level, if revived fully, could be an effective basis for people’s participation in the nation-building efforts.

Village level consultative mechanism has already been utilized not only for small scale community development effort, but also in the electoral process and in the DDR programme (Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration) which Japan is leading.

I might have painted the future of Afghanistan too brightly. The way ahead for peace and prosperity for Afghanistan is still bumpy and there is no guarantee for a successful end. However, the most important factor for the successful rehabilitation of a failed state is the will and aspiration of the people. The actions and the participation of the Afghans are now visible, even though in a burgeoning stage. It is the responsibility of the international community to continue supporting their efforts. To ignore them or lessen our support at this juncture in time, through being overshadowed by other events, is a critical mistake and would allow history to repeat itself.

I hope that what I have said is agreeable to the people here and that we continue paying attention and extending support. By doing that, we can create a success story of the international community’s joint efforts against human calamity, which in turn will prove to be effective in our efforts for making the world more safe and secure. ●



A Civilization of Peace

Shokichi Kina

Member of the House of Councillors



While serving as a member of the House of Councillors of Japan, I have been engaged in peace activities under the slogan of “replacing every arm with a musical instrument” which I developed some time ago. As a proud member of the Okinawan people, I would like to present my opinions on how to sweep away the tools for war from this world.

We face a large number of global problems: abnormal weather caused by global warming, the big earthquake off Sumatra and subsequent tsunami at the end of the last year, man-made disasters like the Iraqi war and many others. It goes without saying that we human beings have contributed to the causes for those difficult problems.

The resources of our earth are limited. But human desires are unlimited.

In the past, people thought the earth had limitless resources. It is why those who obtained the largest resources were considered “winners” entitled to enjoy all the wealth. But as we know more about space, we have come to realize that the earth is a planet with limited resources and that nothing, even water or air, is limitless. Thus the lack of awareness for civilization has a lot to do with this naïve belief that those resources should last forever.

The military-industrial complex, using wars as its means and motivated to take every thing by force in order to win, is the cancer cell in the earth. A cancer cell would proliferate and eventually kill the host before it dies. If the military-industrial complex continues to ruin the world, it would exterminate mankind and eventually it will fall, although it is not aware of this.

The military-industrial complex has an illusion that wars have driven the process of civilization. According

to the explanation on the structure of a human body at DNA level, only the information specific to each part of the body, eyes or nose, is active. Such active information altogether shapes the whole, and the rest is dormant. To clone a sheep, therefore, DNA taken from the mastitis had to be kept in a state of under-nutrition, the state of the nearly dead, so that all the dormant information could be activated. The evolutionary theory for civilization driven by war in explaining how the population explosion came about is based on the same idea.

But we should realize that mankind has fought as many as 5,000 wars in a period of 3,000 years and still is adding more to the figure. By now it has come to possess nuclear, chemical and biological weapons good for destroying the earth and the human race tens of thousands of times over. Moreover, hundreds of thousands of scientists are still engaged in producing destructive weapons, even though what exists now is already sufficient for annihilating mankind. If we don't call this foolish behaviour lack of awareness for civilization, what else could we say?

The evolutionary theory for civilization driven by war can be valid as long as wars are sporadic. We all should become conscious that wars could kill us all, if nothing is to be done. States, democrat and communist, are conceivable only with their imperfections. It is because they are both heading toward destruction by letting their limited natural wealth be destroyed by the system of military-industrial complex.

From this perspective, we come to realize that neither science nor civilization is bad in itself, but that the real problem lies inside the man-made system. When we see Mother Earth damaged, torn and worn, we realize there is no winner of a war and a war means the defeat of all mankind. At the same time we realize wars are not the only way for going under. Co-habitation holds

the key for enjoying the blessings of Nature.

To start with, we must know the answer to our problem. The earth is a sacred place for us. We are made alive by the earth. We need to be aware that this planet, once shining beautifully in the space, once called Gaia, is now very sick. We must make sure the sea is the home for all living things as well as allowing Mother Earth to get healthy again.

Unfortunately there are moves in an opposite direction. The worst of them are wars and the destruction of nature. The worst crisis facing the present civilization is the fact that militaries, politics, economies, culture and religions have been integrated into the military-industrial complex. The only way to cure this disease of the earth is to pluck up the courage for making a big jump from civilization of war to civilization of peace. Even when civilizations continued to spoil the earth under the name of advancement, the aborigines never gave up the lifestyle in harmony with the earth.

They always thanked the earth for its blessings and showed respect to all forms of life with prayers. They play the role of giving a light to the majority of the people who, living in the destructive civilization, tend to be nihilistic. Opening the mind, led into the world of the aboriginal peoples. The people who discovered the forest, the sky and the ocean are all full of vivid and endless lives. Their spirit takes root in the Earth. Civilization of war is totally detached from the earth. The aborigines have taught us when we are cut off from the earth, we are cut off from heaven as well. Facing the severest human right problem, the aborigines do not represent the tragic story alone. Open ourselves to them, the civilization would then see God again. Civilization of peace that the people dream about in this century could be realized if the United Nations is transformed into an earth management organ, and the wise men coming to their senses, together with men of religion and Nobel Laureates would make the most of creativity and wisdom of NGOs, respect the spirit of the aborigines and build a rainbow bridge over us all. Then we will recover our lost memories and a brand new civilization will start developing on this planet.

The Chernobyl nuclear reactor disaster affected wide areas far beyond national borders. The same is true for the consequences of wars, global warming and security interests. But handling of these different issues is left

the hands of respective nation. Diseases are on a global scale. Treatment is handled by each nation. No wonder, it does not work. Until this problem is solved, sustainable development will not be real.

If the UN continues to be monopolized by the permanent members of its Security Council, or the victor nations, we will see no balance in the management of the world. It is time to take bold actions for reforming the organization.

In Okinawa where I was born and brought up, people used to call their own island *uruma* meaning "the peace", living happily with nature. It was not so long ago when national borders appeared in the world. We should simply return to the world where no borders existed. By doing so, we can enter the future stage of the world.

During the Second World War, Japan was the only nation where ground battles took place on its territories. In Okinawa, 150,000 people or 1/3 of its total population died. Of all the US troops and facilities presently deployed in Japan, 75% are in Okinawa which occupies just 0.6% of the total land space of Japan. This situation creates special political and economic conditions in Okinawa, making its culture very special. It means that peace is an issue..

I am an advocator of establishing an Asian United Nations in Okinawa. Let me explain this idea. The people in Okinawa have the mentality of both a minority and a majority.

In the past Okinawa renounced all arms. Strangely enough, the US, a nation possessing the world largest armaments has the largest military base in the Far East in Okinawa. Okinawa is part of Japan, an economic super power. Geopolitically Okinawa is considered a keystone, for its military presence. Now the US army undergoes major reorganization but the people of Okinawa never stop longing for peace. They long for peace even though they find themselves in-between the crashing hegemonies of the US to the east and China to the west.

The geopolitical conditions could be a cornerstone for peace from a different viewpoint. It relates to how to recover science and technology that have been drained into the military field. How could we recycle

the economic wealth gained at the sacrifice of our earth? In finding answers to those questions, someday Okinawa can lead the world into reconciliation. To begin with, I think Okinawa should become a first model of transcending national borders under the protection of the United Nations. If a project for dismantling arms is launched under the sponsorship of the UN, inviting the areas presently in conflict, crashed

between the large nations' borders, to participate on condition that they will give up arms, helping them to become independent, our dream "one mankind, one earth" would come true. For this purpose, Japan and the EU should co-operate closely. The basis for real human rights and democracy should be found in prayers and festivals promoting explicitly the love for the earth, not in destruction and wars. ●

NGOs and Women

Hiroko Hara

President, Japan Women's Watch



In 1975 the First World Conference on Women was held in Mexico. Thirty years later, the 4th World Conference on Women, which became a landmark conference, was held in Beijing. Yet another ten years later, the 49th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (Beijing Plus Ten) took place at the United Nations headquarters in New York from 28 February to 11 March this year. This conference attracted keen interest and was attended by not only representatives of governments but also by women's NGOs from all over the world. Japan Women's Watch (JAWW) has also been active these past few years in preparation for the Beijing Plus Ten and one point of progress in this respect can be seen in the Japan NGO Report Preparatory Committee. The activities of this committee focused on preparing for the Beijing Plus Five, a special session of the UN General Assembly held in 2000, trying to ensure that the views of Japanese NGOs are reflected in the government's position and working in co-operation with the women's NGO Asia Pacific Women's Watch to make sure that the views of NGOs in the Asia and Asia Pacific regions are heard at the UN. In Japan, several organizations, including that of Michiko Nakamura, have been active in the pre- and post-Second World War period, gathering a wide range of experience and actively taking part in a women's coalition in the international community

and the Pacific region. I am seventy years old but, among such veteran activists, am considered to be indeed rather young. In terms of negotiations with the government, it is women like Fusae Ichikawa who paved the way for women's consumer and political organizations to be included in various government committees and other institutions after the Second World War. Members of women's organizations, regardless of party affiliation, also made their way into the Diet.

These distinguished women activists worked, from the initial stages of their activities, towards the objectives of peace and human rights protection. The Japan's Christian Women's Temperance Union (WCTU, Nihon Kirisutokyo Fujin Kyofukai), which was established in 1886, to this day continues to protect the rights of victims of domestic violence, victims of international human rights violations who do not have the protection of the Japanese government and migrant workers. The YWCA, established in Japan in 1905, carries out its activities under the ideals of Equality, Development and Peace. In addition, the establishment of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and the League of Women Voters (Nippon Fujin Yukensha Domei) enhanced the participation of Japanese women in politics and led to women earning

the right to vote in the 1946 general elections. Since then and up to the present, the turnout of women voters has exceeded that of men. However, in the UNDP Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), Japan ranks thirty-ninth among the surveyed countries. In other words, although the people of Japan contribute largely to international activities through taxes—and women too, pay heavy taxes—in terms of making their views heard on a political level and participating in the decision making process, we still must overcome a major hurdle.

The first World Conference on Women in 1975 inspired the launch of the International Women's Year Liaison Group at the end of the same year. It makes approaches to the government and local assemblies. Based on women's NGOs' experience in a wide range of activities including consumer movements and their track record in submitting comments with regard to policy decision, members of women's NGOs now participate in committees at various ministries. The foundations for such activities have been put in place since 1975. In particular, with the increase in the percentage of the ageing population in the 1970s, the Women's Association for the Better Ageing Society (WABAS), represented by Keiko Higuchi, began its activities in central Tokyo and gradually came to have offices all over Japan. A sister organization was established just recently in South Korea. The ageing population in Asian countries including Japan is growing at a much more rapid pace than in the West. WABAS participates in and influences various policy-making processes with regard to the gender issues of the ageing society in Asia, where Confucianism and the belief that women should obey men are considered the norm.

I am the Vice-Representative of Japan's Network for Women and Health (WHJ), which was triggered by the United Nations International Conference on Population Development in Cairo in 1994. Since the network has been very active, resulting in the revision of the Eugenic Protection Law, which

became the Maternity Protection Law, approval of the government of low-dosage oral contraceptives and practicing Gender Sensitive Medicine in Japan. WHJ's membership is predominantly female. In environmental NGOs men and women in their thirties are very active as equal partners. In 1998 at the Johannesburg International Conference on Crime Prevention Partnerships to Build Community Safety - Urban Safety, Safety for All, I observed how capable these young Japanese men and women are in negotiating, within a framework of international collaboration, with officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Environment Ministry. The challenge now for women's NGOs is to maintain an approach that will enable them to work together with young people in their twenties and thirties and, most importantly, to put forth an argument so that those people who are adverse to the idea of gender equality and equal participation by men and women (regardless of whether they are male or female) will come to understand that gender equality is an essential part of building a sustainable society.

In international society, the UN and European foundations hold workshops and training sessions for NGOs in developing countries, helping them to develop skills which are essential to NGO activities. These NGOs are rapidly gaining in strength. On the other hand, NGOs in Japan, lacking such funding, are for the most part extremely poor. The Japanese tax system also makes NGO activities difficult. Women's NGOs are no exception. For example, when we attend Asia-Pacific regional meetings, we learn quite a lot from women's NGOs in the Philippines, Thailand, India, South Korea, and China. A Headquarters for the Promotion of Gender Equality has been set up within the Cabinet but it is only in collaboration with international society that it will be able to fulfil its functions as part of the national machinery in policy-making. The important thing is for women's NGOs to continue to maintain a firm collaboration with representatives of international society, such as the EU and the UN. ●

The State of the Global Human Rights Movement Today

Lotte Leicht

Director, Human Rights Watch, Brussels



Over the past 20 years, a vast array of human rights groups – both national as well as international – have breathed life into the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the many other conventions and human rights norms that have been developed since World War II. The banner of human rights is now raised by a huge variety of different actors around the world. Many countries, including those in the European Union, have enacted legislation to make respect for human rights a factor in their own bilateral relations. Many countries now also have domestic human rights commissioners and human rights ombudsmen, human rights education is part of the curriculum in more than 60 countries today, and most countries have indeed ratified most of the major human rights treaties.

The human rights movement itself has also become much more inclusive than it used to be. It is today a substantial mosaic that includes large professional international NGOs as well as thousands of regional, national and local organizations working on issues ranging from self-determination, the rights of children, access to HIV medication, and the right to water, to research and documentation of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The different layers of the movement indeed complement each other: there are groups seeking to promote rights by creating the building blocks – such as a free press, an independent judiciary, and civilian control over military – of rights-respecting societies. And there are groups which investigate and monitor the respective human rights norms and try to mobilize pressure to prevent and end abuse.

During the Cold War, human rights mobilization accomplished much, playing no small role in the end of apartheid in South Africa, and the move towards democratic governments in much of

Latin America. The Helsinki process in Europe created a framework for citizens, both within and outside the Soviet Bloc, to challenge repressive governments, ultimately leading to the collapse of the Soviet system. The end of the Cold War also seemed to bring a new consensus around the human rights ideal: many of the dissidents of the Soviet Bloc who had created the human rights movement there, and for whom the international movement had campaigned, were swept into power. A movement towards multi-party democracy took hold in Africa, Latin America and in some parts of Asia.

The principle of state sovereignty yielded steadily in the face of human rights; in 1993, the opening speech of the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna, decisively put the sovereignty defense to rest by proclaiming “the promotion and protection of all human rights is the legitimate concern of the international community”. The way a state treated its people was indeed everyone’s business from now on. In the face of challenges by supporters of cultural relativism, the Vienna conference also emphatically declared that “the universal nature of these rights and freedoms is beyond any question.”

It is important, of course, also to recognize the weaknesses of the movement during this period. Even in this ‘golden decade’ of the 1990’s, the human rights movement could not stop the genocides in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, it could not stop crimes against humanity in East Timor and Chechnya, and the large-scale killings of millions of civilians in armed conflicts in Central Africa. Half of our planet’s six billion people still live in poverty, and 24% in absolute poverty. Two billion of the human rights movement’s clients do not have healthcare, and 1.5 billion have no access

to clean drinking water. So in a world in which intolerance and extremism seem to be on the rise, in which millions die in armed conflict, in which poverty and misery are rampant, some are tempted to ask whether improved norms have accomplished anything for people in need of justice or aid or mercy or bread.

However, it is vital not to confuse gloom about the current course of human events with scepticism about the value of the human rights endeavour or the accomplishments of the movement. In the process of developing norms, and in the mobilization of their enforcement, we have indeed achieved concrete results. It is also important to note the important coalition between NGOs and small and medium-size governments that has led to real and important progress in international standard-setting, the most recent being the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the land mines treaty, and the establishment of the International Criminal Court.

It was at the height of our strength as a movement that we have been confronted with the greatest challenge of all. The criminal attacks of September 11, 2001, have unleashed a reaction that threatens now, under the cover of an endless war on terror, to undo many gains. The campaign against terrorism has seen the erosion of international law rather than its enforcement, and human rights have been undermined at the very time they needed most to be upheld. Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib have become symbols of violations we all hoped would not occur. The erosion by the United States of both international human rights and humanitarian law has had and will continue to have devastating effects worldwide. Around the world, people have disappeared while being detained by the US military, becoming ‘ghost detainees’, or have been put in indefinite detention without any recourse to normal due process. The very erosion of the legitimacy of international humanitarian law can have damning consequences, not just for civilians but also for combatants, including American soldiers.

Around the world, many opportunistic governments have cynically attempted to take advantage of the

campaign on terror by intensifying their own crackdowns on their perceived domestic opponents, or by suggesting that they should be immune from criticisms of their own human rights practices. Many states have responded to the indiscriminate violence of terrorism with new laws and measures which themselves fail to discriminate between the guilty and the innocent. Numerous countries have passed regressive anti-terrorism laws that expand governmental powers of detention and surveillance in ways that threaten basic rights. There has been a spate of arbitrary arrests and of detentions of suspects without due process, and in some cases those branded as terrorists have faced assassination and even extra-judiciary killings.

One of the most profoundly worrying developments has been the renewed debate over the legitimacy of torture. Even if torture had continued to be widespread around the world, until recently it had become almost axiomatic that no country publicly condoned torture. Thanks to the human rights movement, torture had come to be considered the ultimate degradation, an unspeakable barbarity that was no longer permissible under any circumstances. Now concerns for human rights have taken a backseat to lining up allies in the war against terror, effectively giving free passes to strategic allies that continue with abuses.

In this new era, the movement must demonstrate that the international promotion of human rights is the best tool in the fight against terrorism, both nationally and internationally. While terrorists themselves are not likely to be mollified by policy changes, we must act on the evidence that support for terrorism feeds off repression, injustice, inequality and lack of opportunity. Where there is democracy and equality, where there is hope and where there are peaceful possibilities for change, terrorism will not gain popular support. Global security is thus enhanced by the success of open societies that foster respect for the rule of law, promote tolerance and guarantee people’s rights of free expression and peaceful dissent.

In the US, understandable fears resulting from 9/11 have been exploited by the Bush administration, both at the domestic and at the foreign policy level, to press for radical rollback of both constitutional

rights and international law. The human rights movement is now striving to persuade Americans that while the government has to be empowered to take measures that are reasonable and necessary to reduce any threat of terrorism, the requirements of security can and must be reconciled with the blessings of liberty.

These difficult times demand that the human rights movement reach its full mobilizing potential and complete the unfinished business of integrating all its parts. We have come a long way, but are still struggling to find ways in which frontline groups can overcome their difficulties in gaining access to funding, the media and expertise, in order to better participate in defining the international rights agenda. Only by empowering our Arab partners to help define the agenda can we also help them counter the perception of human rights as a Western imposition. We must come to grips with the fact that the movement is weakest precisely where support for terrorism is greatest. In order to reach our full strength, we

must create a synergy between the human rights movement and those campaigning for social justice. Even if our agendas are not always a perfect fit, we need to join our voices around the key issues that do unite us.

In many parts of the world, unfortunately, the professional human rights movement seems divorced from popular struggles. Many of our signal successes came about when we joined forces with wider constituencies. The International Campaign to Ban Landmines united a coalition of more than 1300 groups in more than 90 countries. In awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to the campaign, the Nobel committee cited the uniqueness of this effort which, it said, showed “that it has been possible to express and mediate a broad wave of popular commitment in an unprecedented way”. I have no doubt that an overwhelming majority of people in our world support the human rights ideal. Our unfinished task is now to mobilize that majority into a force too important to be resisted. ●



Civil Society Organizations and Peace Building



Paul van Tongeren

Executive Director, European Centre for Conflict Prevention

Today, civil society organizations (CSOs) play an important role in peace building activities all over the world. Their involvement has increased significantly over the past decades. It is a good development that their role is more widely recognized. Since then, many of those CSOs have had a significant influence on the international agenda. Since the 1970s, there has been a large increase in the number of CSOs on themes like development, human rights, health, and environment. As a result the number of NGOs attending UN conferences has also grown rapidly. For instance the number of NGO representatives present at the world conferences on women has risen from 6,000 in Mexico City in 1975 to over 40,000 at the last conference in Beijing in 1995.

One of the problems of the growing number of CSOs getting involved in peace building activities is that the field becomes very fragmented and dispersed. Therefore the importance of regional networking and cooperation with other institutions has increased. These networks are needed:

- to avoid duplication;
- to identify gaps in the field;
- to use limited resources (such as money and staff) efficiently;
- to learn from each others experiences in this relatively new field.

In different fields, regional networking and cooperation are already taking place.

A good example is the role of CSOs in the creation of the Millennium Development Goals. In 2000, a coalition of the World Bank, the UNDP, ministries in the field of development cooperation and hundreds of NGOs drafted goals in the field of development to be reached in a period of 15 years. These Millennium Development Goals were

successfully created. The partners developed a good strategy and are cooperating effectively to reach the goals they set for 2015. Similar cooperation has taken place on the issues land mines and the International Criminal Courts. Efforts should be made to realize a similar cooperation in the field of peace and security. At this moment, 30 to 40 countries are dealing with serious tensions, conflicts and even civil wars.

There is a lot of work to be done by CSOs in the field of conflict resolution, as well as in peace and development and human rights. The actions taken by different CSOs could be much more effective if like-minded governance between those CSOs was realized. Until now, there has been too much of a perception that peace, security, conflict and war are issues for the governments of states. However, the role of civil society is actually very crucial in these kinds of issues, especially in the case of civil wars. Their independence, expertise, integrity and moral authority enable CSOs to act swiftly and flexibly. Their strategies can be characterized as innovative, creative and non-coercive. They are creative in reframing conflict problems. CSOs have proven to be capable of improving communication and relationships by fostering interaction across conflict divides. Their independence enables them to talk to those whom governments cannot talk to. They frequently assist in facilitating dialogue between politicians. CSOs serve as important advocates of justice and human rights. They are responsible for an increase in the constituencies for peace. By mobilizing ‘people power’ CSOs can put pressure on decision makers. Moreover, they play an important role in bearing witness to violations.

A report of the UN Secretary General on the prevention of armed conflict already pointed,

in 2001, to the important role of civil society in the field of conflict prevention. One of the recommendations from this report was the organization of an international conference on the role of civil society in peace building activities. The European Centre for Conflict Prevention has finally taken a lead in organizing this conference. As a result, regional conferences in Africa and North East Asia have taken place. CSOs have come together and have drafted regional action agendas on peace building. At the moment, the European Centre for Conflict Prevention is bringing together all the different action agendas and drafting a global action agenda. In this global action agenda, the role that civil society organizations can play in peace building activities will be defined. The different actors in the field of peace building and conflict prevention, including the UN, governments and CSOs should cooperate and there should be some kind of multi-stakeholder partnership.

Momentum has increased as the agenda for that peace and security has become more important. Civil society actors worldwide can play a vital role in lobbying for more political decisions in

that respect. First of all, in 2004, two important High Level Panel reports were released on the relationship between the UN and civil society and on 'global threats, challenges and change'. Important recommendations from these reports include the realization of a Peace Building Commission and the appointment of a Deputy Secretary General for Peace and Security. Civil society should lobby all around the world for the implementation of those recommendations. A second task for CSOs lies in drafting a global action program on peace building. In July 2005 more than a thousand participants will come together at the UN to discuss issues such as conflict prevention and peace building and what civil society can contribute. Thirdly, the Millennium 5+ Summit in September 2005 will provide an important opportunity for CSOs. All heads of state will come together to discuss collective security, millennium development goals and reform of the UN. Collective security is one of the main issues on the agenda. This will be the right moment to (re)organize civil society, to draft an action agenda and to build coalitions with like-minded governments. These are all chances to make a step forward. ●



NGOs and HIV/AIDS in Africa



Tatsuo Hayashi

Chairman, Africa Japan Forum

My topic is how we are not powerless. Our organization has been in direct contact with the lives of children, working with children starving due to damage from drought in Ethiopia, children with HIV/AIDS living in hospices in South Africa, and children suffering from leukaemia probably as a result of depleted-uranium shells used in the Gulf War in Iraq. In such situations, it is always the poorest and the socially weakest that are the first to die. Relief efforts are limited in effect and all too often too late. Asking ourselves whether there are any ways to avoid such tragedies before they happen and how effective early warning is, we have come to feel that we too must also take on a political role.

As we have seen in the case of the tsunami disaster caused by the Sumatra Earthquake, there is what is known as an 'aid rush'. Even NGOs fall over one another, competing for their place and for credit. Under such conditions, various problems have arisen as a result of aid efforts, for example, the devastation of the local food industry and agriculture in Ethiopia. There have also been hidden tragedies. For example, at the time of the famine in Ethiopia, Japanese media reports focused exclusively on the situation, drowning out the issue of apartheid. So I would like you to also look at what issues will be hidden behind the recent tsunami damage.

Human life is not simply an issue of water, food and energy. Underlying these needs are issues of the environment and agriculture. In the tsunami disaster caused by the Sumatra Earthquake, for example, there is the problem of people losing their land, as well as issues of human rights and peace. At the disaster sites, we will certainly be seeing disputes over housing and land. Such problems often arise in areas where social relations and political and economic conditions are inadequate. It is not only disasters, wars and HIV/AIDS that have an impact on human life. Today, globalization and anti-terrorism measures since September 11, 2001

also have an impact on and are inseparable from our lives. In the 1980s, Japanese NGOs not only carried out their activities in the field but also worked in Japan, promoting developmental education and making policy recommendations and evolving in the process. However, this is no longer enough.

The HIV/AIDS patients that I meet die within a matter of six months. These patients ask to have at least a dignified death. HIV is considered a health issue but it is really an issue of human rights and health. In terms of human life, medicine that does not reach children in South African hospices reaches children in Brazil, saving their lives. The reason for this is because they have taken action against the US on the issue of access to medicine, which is considered intellectual property. Such a feat can only be accomplished when intellectuals familiar with the outside world and local residents' organizations work hand in hand. HIV victims are also taking action. Some individuals take the initiative, calling for HIV treatment for all patients, which is then supported by NGOs like our own. It is your voices that are the key to victory. The UN proposed a plan to treat three million HIV patients by 2005. Before this stage could be reached, there were numerous signature-gathering campaigns, which were supported by NGOs, leading to a change in WTO rules brought about by the weight of numbers. It is at this point only that the UN can take action. This is the order in which things happen in this world. Your voices are what moves the world and this has now developed into a wide-spread movement.

Since the events of September 11, 2001, anti-terrorism has come to take priority over all else. Under the pretext of combating terrorism, acts of violence are committed by the state against the weak and violation of human rights has become widespread. Such actions have also been directed at NGOs in the country and our voice has been weakening. Now, in 2005, we are

actually beginning to see a new development. With a view to achieving the Millennium Development Goals, which include reducing by half the proportion of people living in poverty by 2015, a team to address the issue of world poverty has also been established in Japan and has started to take action. Can we become a bridge to the world? Connecting with the world and information are the key elements for success. NGOs have very limited financial resources but information is free. What is necessary from now on is not only to be heard directly by the government but also open action. The campaigns to eliminate HIV and mines are considered examples of success. These campaigns succeeded because they were taken out of the meeting

rooms into the open so that people could see what was going on. Another key to success will be the active participation of Japan, which is new. Japan is a country with international influence but one which also is overly eager to follow in the footsteps of the US. The significance of a change in the individual citizens of such a country is very great. I said before that it is your voices, more than anything else, that counts. It is neither specialists nor NGOs that hold the key to the future. The number of people, that is, your number, is what decides the outcome and shapes our way. In this sense, although we Japanese are prone to thinking that we are powerless, I would like to repeat: we are not powerless. ●

NGOs and Humanitarian Assistance and Development

Samia Nakhoul

Gulf Bureau Chief, Reuters



In the Middle East, with its ethnic conflicts, wars and failed systems from Sudan to Iraq, the role of NGOs is of extreme importance in bridging the growing gaps in healthcare, nutrition, sanitation and education. The dysfunctional systems are numerous and have been well analysed over the past three years by the UN-sponsored Arab Human Development reports. However, I would like to focus on Iraq, which presents a dramatic case for the urgent need for NGO assistance after the 2003 US war and the subsequent chaos.

The particularly traumatic history of Iraq is well known – it suffered more than three decades of Saddam Hussein's tyrannical rule, three wars and 13 years of draconian economic sanctions even before it was plunged into its present situation. Iraqis today, nearly two years after the war, are still living in an emergency situation. The needs in Iraq are on such a large scale, especially in basic infrastructure, that the

contribution of NGOs is indispensable. Iraq used to be a rich country. Before Saddam Hussein embarked on his eight years war against Iran, Iraq ranked as an upper middle income country with a standard of living comparable to the lower levels of the European Union before its recent expansion. By the time the sanctions had begun to bite, in the mid-1990s after the 1991 Gulf War over Kuwait, Iraqi per capita income had fallen to the level of that of Mali. In the most recent war, initial American forecasts of a short campaign followed by rapid, almost self-financing reconstruction, and leading to democratic stability, proved right only in one respect – the speed of the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime. Soon after, however, security disintegrated. The occupation authority's decision to disband the army and security forces broke the back of the Iraqi state and helped fuel what rapidly became a lethal insurgency.

Even though, in much of the Shi'ite south of Iraq and

in the Kurdish north, political parties or religious institutions have to some extent been able to step into this vacuum, the overall picture is one of chaos and a serious collapse, not only in security but in health, education and nutrition levels. The UN oil-for-food programme, introduced in 1996 to help alleviate the punitive sanctions, managed to decrease child malnutrition in Iraq by 50%. By contrast, according to UNICEF, the number of children with acute malnutrition rose sharply – in fact it nearly doubled -- after the 2003 war and malnutrition today is higher than after the first Gulf War in 1991. The US occupation authorities and the interim Iraqi government have had no means to deal with this, despite various attempts.

By any standards, the Iraq situation is appalling. Officials at the Ministry of Health say there has been an increase in diseases caused by dirty water. They fear that unless water and sanitation problems are resolved soon, it will be difficult for people to recover. Children are considered to be most at risk. Child mortality is on the rise and UNICEF says it will probably increase. According to Iraqi Health Ministry officials, a virulent form of hepatitis that is especially lethal to pregnant women has broken out in some areas of Iraq. They warn that a collapse of water and sewage systems in the light of continuing violence in the country is probably at the root of the outbreak.

The disease, called Hepatitis E, is caused by a virus that is often spread by sewage-contaminated drinking water. In 2003 and 2004, a higher percentage of hepatitis cases of all types were also reported across Iraq than ever before. In yet another indication of the deteriorating safety of water and food in Iraq, the number of reported cases of typhoid fever has risen sharply this year. Almost two years after the US-led war, many of Iraq's water and sewage plants are still in disrepair. The purchasing power, nutrition and living conditions of the majority of Iraq's 26 million people have all worsened.

A recent survey by an NGO group, Medical Aid for the Third World, stated that medical infrastructure and medical equipment already outdated, broken and malfunctioning as a result of 12 years of sanctions, have not been replaced or improved. War victims and other patients do not receive optimal or even adequate treatment, and complicated surgery cannot be

performed. Everything is lacking, including medicine for acute as well as chronic ailments. This leads to deteriorating conditions and a high mortality rate. At some hospitals, there is lack of sterile treatment, and as a result all patients with major burns are likely to die. At one hospital, only three respiratory machines in a 16-bed high intensive care unit were working. Besides these issues of basic medical, sanitation and education projects, there is, in effect, a constant state of emergency that requires NGOs' assistance, not least to help the displaced, orphans and widows of war and the handicapped. Continued violence and insecurity have added to the psychological traumas of children, many of whom already suffer serious emotional and behavioural problems as a direct result of the war, the fear and the occupation. Some life-saving drugs are not available. Many patients do not get the medicine they need, or they get only half of the dose they need, putting them at risk in cases of epilepsy, hypertension, diabetes and chronic asthma and other conditions.

The picture in the field of education is dismal. Iraq was once the most educated society in the Arab world, but illiteracy has now reached a stage where Iraqis are near the bottom of the already dispiriting table of the league of Arab countries. Prior to the 1991 Gulf War, Iraqis, many with higher education and successful careers as doctors, engineers, lawyers and academics, had been seen as a sort of elite in the region. We are in a very specific situation under which NGOs generally do not have access to Iraq, not because of a dictator who was suspicious of any independent initiative but because of the total lack of security in Iraq. The most significant NGO presence in the period before, during and after the US war, apart from UN international agencies, was the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Speaking as someone who witnessed the war, I feel confident that the number of those killed in the war, estimated at tens of thousands, would have been much higher without the intervention of the ICRC staff. One staff member lost his life while on duty when his car came under shelling on April 8, the day US troops entered Baghdad. Among the handful of NGOs that were in Baghdad long before the war was Care International. Great tribute goes to a British-Iraqi woman, Margaret Hassan, who had been providing humanitarian services to the people of Iraq for much of her life before she was kidnapped and killed by Islamist militants last year. Persistent and widespread

violence continues throughout Iraq, forcing NGOs to withdraw and the ICRC to adopt an exceptional *modus operandi*, basically relying more on local than international staff following attacks on its offices in 2003.

But what should never be forgotten is the relief with which we – and above all ordinary Iraqis – greeted the arrival of any NGOs that came to Baghdad after Saddam Hussein was toppled. These organizations had to work in the most appalling and threatening circumstances. They clearly made a difference, but their work has been disrupted by Islamist militants who chose to target, kidnap and kill them. All this has created a climate of fear preventing NGOs from

helping Iraq. The solution is far from clear, as the present situation of violence and chaos continues. What is perfectly clear, however, is how great the needs of the Iraqis for assistance and support are. Perhaps an immediate, if only partial solution is for international NGOs to concentrate on helping set up local operations, staffed by Iraqis but backed up by visiting teams and external support. This would help meet desperate local needs until the security situation improves enough for foreigners to be located inside the country. It might also have as a spin-off the encouragement of local skills, problem-solving and self-reliance – something Iraqis used to have in abundance, and will surely regain. ●

Involving Citizens' Movements and NGOs in Environmental Governance

Lorraine Elliott
University of Warwick



In a speech in 1987, Gro Harlem Brundtland argued that one of the main prerequisites for sustainable development was a political system that secured effective participation in decision-making. Why should participation be important as a measure of the democratic process? Because those whose lives are most affected by environmental change – and this is often those who are most marginalized in economic and political terms – must be acknowledged and represented and they must be able to make their concerns and their views known. Consent is crucial to the democratic process. The assumption is sometimes made that this objective can be adequately met if national environmental governance is democratic and participatory. My starting point here is that the democratic process demands global democracy as well and that this is a democracy that includes people as well as states. My second point is that participation in decision-making is only one component of the democratic

process. The democratic process also includes the implementation of environmental norms and agreements and it must be accountable as well as transparent. It must deliver outcomes that are fair and just as well as those that are environmentally sound.

In a short piece in *The Economist* in 1999, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan described two concepts of sovereignty – that of states and that of individuals. Although his analysis there was in the context of what some see as a growing norm of humanitarian intervention, his observation that ‘states are now widely understood to be instruments at the service of their peoples’ is equally relevant for environmental governance and for the democratic process. If, as Principle 2 of the Rio Declaration on the Environment and Development proclaims, states have sovereign rights over their resources and their environment and development policy, NGOs

and grass-roots movements have a role to play in ensuring that those rights are exercised responsibly, as the second half of Principle 2 requires. This has been described by some as a check on unbridled state sovereignty, and by others as constructive vigilance.

In what ways are environmental NGOs and grass-roots movements part of this process? There is, of course, no archetypal environmental NGO. Environmental NGOs and grass-roots movements are diverse in philosophy, scope and size; in the degree of institutionalization; in the objectives they pursue; and in the tasks that they undertake. They have diverse constituencies. Some are primarily concerned with protecting the environment as a political goal in and of itself. For others, and this includes many grassroots movements, environmental protection and sustainable development are important objectives in the pursuit of justice for disadvantaged groups and communities. This includes indigenous and tribal peoples, women (especially but not exclusively in developing countries), and those who live in conditions of poverty. NGOs are perceived to be representative or reflective of community voices and non-corporate interests, driven by values rather than profits. In this sense, environmental NGOs and grassroots movements are not simply the beneficiaries of the democratization of environmental governance; they have helped to create and inspire that democratization.

The participation and activism of NGOs and grassroots movements is now an accepted fact in the global politics of the environment, and it is one that is increasingly although unevenly supported by agreements such as Agenda 21 or the Johannesburg Declaration adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. This participation and activism takes different forms. Environmental NGOs continue to have an important role in agenda-setting and mobilizing governments into multilateral environmental negotiations. They have helped to define the environmental agenda to include the interests of those who are most affected by environmental degradation, pollution and resource exploitation. They are participants in those negotiations as accredited observers able to table documents, speak at negotiating sessions, and contribute to working groups; as lobbyists,

convening side-events and media conferences and reporting on the negotiations through the Internet and preparation of daily newsletters and reviews; and as activists, organizing parallel civil society forums and engaging in direct action and protest. The boundaries between government and non-government have sometimes become blurred. NGO representatives may be members of official government delegations. NGOs sometimes work in close alliance with like-minded governments and intergovernmental organizations and are often a welcome and important source of expertise and knowledge for smaller delegations who may be overshadowed and sometimes marginalized by the delegations of larger states.

Through monitoring compliance with national and international environmental legislation and making public their findings, NGOs and grassroots movements can help to bring transparency and accountability to environmental governance, both of which are important components of the democratic process. It is more often NGOs than governments who expose environmental illegality and non-compliance. Some NGOs and grassroots movements have become an important source of scientific expertise, working with the scientific community but also exposing prevailing scientific opinion to scrutiny and bringing alternative knowledge perspectives, such as those of indigenous communities, into public debate. NGOs and grassroots organizations have also become important in providing services that governments are often unable or unwilling to provide, contributing to environmental development assistance and devising and managing environmental repair, management and training projects.

What academics like to call the ‘counter-factual’ seems intuitively persuasive – that without the activity and the expertise of environmental NGOs and other civil society groups, the procedures and outcomes of global environmental governance would have been less democratic. There would have been fewer and weaker multilateral environmental agreements and compliance without them would have been more uneven and less open to public scrutiny. There are now many studies that demonstrate the influence that NGOs have had on the circumstances of decision making,

state practice and implementation on a range of environmental issues – ocean protection, species protection, the Antarctic, ozone, desertification, biodiversity, climate change are examples. There is also little doubt that what seems to be an increased willingness by the institutions of economic governance, such as the World Bank or the World Trade Organization, to pay greater public and policy attention to environment and sustainable development concerns and, in the case of the former at least, to develop more consultative strategies, is in some measure a result of the pressure of civil society groups, including environmental ones, over a period of time. On the other hand, one must be cautious in claiming too much. Despite their profile, NGOs and grassroots movements rarely possess the resources and influence of other ‘stakeholder’ groups such as corporate and business actors, for example.

Participation brings with it its own complexities for environmental NGOs and, therefore, for the democratic process. Environmental NGOs and grassroots movements must be certain of their own democratic credentials. I do not mean by this that they should be elected or necessarily be subject to formal

accountability mechanisms. They should, however, engage in civil society mindful of countervailing voices. Environmental NGOs involved in debt-for-nature strategies have been criticized for disregarding local communities in making decisions about the environmental component of the transactions. Tensions between northern and southern NGOs and grassroots movements over policy, strategy and the reconciliation of environment and development are also not unknown.

There are concerns that participatory rights at multilateral negotiations have become meaningful ‘primarily for well-organized, well-financed and well-informed NGOs’, as one observer writing in the Harvard Law Review has put it. The challenge for the democratic process is therefore to ensure that access to public debate and environmental governance is cast as wide as possible and that NGOs and grassroots movements are empowered to participate in dialogue in a variety of ways. The global must not ignore the local. In furthering the discussion on involving citizens’ movements and NGOs in environmental governance, it is crucial to remember that participation is the democratic means to a democratic end, not the end in itself. ●



Fair-wood Campaign of Friends of the Earth Japan



Toshiharu Okazaki
Friends of the Earth Japan

Since the Cologne Summit in 1999, “illegal logging” has been on the agenda of both the Okinawa and Kananaskis Summits. It is a major international issue that is also scheduled to be discussed at the coming G8 Summit in the UK in July. The Friends of the Earth Fair-wood Campaign refers to “legal timber”. This means that the forests from which the logs used for timber are cut will be properly reforested. Such forests are called sustainable forests. What is necessary today is to be able to make use of forest resources without compromising biodiversity and without reducing the forests’ capacity to absorb carbon dioxide. “Fair-wood” is a term coined by our organization to designate timber produced and processed from such sustainable forests.

In the past ten years, the depletion of forest resources has mainly come about as a result of the reckless deforestation of tropical forests and rainforests. A substantial volume of timber produced through such activity was exported to developed countries. The 1992 Rio Earth Summit saw the adoption of the Statement of the Forest Principles, following which “criteria and indicators” for “sustainable forest management” were introduced at the regional and national levels. These efforts, however, were not respected by industry and traders working at the site of the logging, who illegally increased timber production allowing the depletion of forest resources to continue unchecked. According to UN statistics, in the 1990s forest area equal to one half of Japan’s total forest area of twenty-five million square metres was lost every year on a world-wide basis.

The first pillar in our efforts concerns the export of timber. This involves making sure that those working at the actual site of logging observe rules and that documents are consistent with

actual timber. Views are beginning to converge towards a conditional definition of what may be considered “legal timber”. A system for tracking actual timber by attaching bar code labels is also being developed. Our organization participates in such efforts by timber-producing countries and makes appeals to businesses involved in logging and in the import and export of timber to comply with the system.

The second pillar consists of organizing campaigns in timber-importing countries. In terms of net import, that is, the volume of import minus the volume of export, Japan has the highest volume of timber import in the world. Until recently, consumers and importers of timber in Japan have considered “illegal logging and trade” to be a domestic issue of timber-exporting countries and have shown little willingness to address the problem. However, as the EU strengthens its approach on the issue through the joint efforts of its government and the private sector, exporting countries such as Indonesia have come to regard such efforts as the duties of importing countries and have begun to demand similar measures from the government and private sector in Japan. As a result, we have at last begun to see some developments in our country.

The third pillar consists of promoting the “forest certification system” in Japan. “Certified timber” has been coming into widespread use in Europe and the US. In these Western countries, campaigns by forest conservation organizations have led to increased demand for certified timber by environmentally-minded citizens. As more and more imported timber becomes certified timber, importers may make use of this distinction to promote their goods. Without a widely-used certification system, Japan may find this trend

harmful to the sales of its domestic timber. Japan is a “forest country” with an annual forest resources increment amounting to as much as three times its volume of domestic timber production. Fostering Japan’s forests requires, to a certain extent, reinvigoration of its forestry. To this end, what is needed today is a “forest certification system” that will allow us to put domestically produced “certified timber” on the market.

Friends of the Earth Japan co-operates and/or collaborates in the above campaigns with various stakeholders in society. One concerns an international movement, and the other, two activities in Japan involving procurement in the public and private sectors.

The first is an example of partnership as an international campaign. The Asia Forest Partnership (AFP) was launched on the initiative of Japan at the Johannesburg Summit. The word ‘partnership’ here implies multilateralism but even more than that it emphasizes a multi-stakeholder partnership. In other words, a framework within which governments, industrial associations, corporations, research institutions and citizens’ organizations work together on forest issues. The AFP’s activities fall into three categories—“illegal logging”, “forest fires”, and “rehabilitation of devastated land”—with particular focus on addressing the illegal logging problem. AFP has already held four meetings and one workshop and the recommendations and comments of Friends of the Earth Japan always receive considerable attention. Although multi-stakeholder partnerships have a drawback in that, due to the large number of stakeholders involved, they require a long time to draw up an Action Plan, Friends of the Earth Japan and its fellow NGOs persevere in promoting the campaign in an effort to persuade the logging industry to address the issue in earnest. Russia is also a member of the AFP. In fact, Friends of the Earth Japan’s forest conservation efforts began with the Russian Far East.

The second example concerns the “greening” of government procurement. Although this is a domestic movement, it aims at preserving the forests of Japan and around the world. The Law

Concerning the Promotion of Procurement of Eco-Friendly Goods and Services by the State and Other Entities falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Environment and covers an extremely wide range of products from stationery to consumer electronics to construction materials. The Fair-wood Campaign, meanwhile, focuses on the forest-related products of paper and timber and involves once-yearly participation in hearings and submission of comments in connection with the revision of legal standards. In addition to these activities, information is exchanged on a continuous basis with procurement officials, especially those in charge of facilities procurement at the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, to ensure “green” government procurement the year round. One recent topic was the stipulation by the UK government that it “will not purchase illegal timber”. I hear that the EU has also recently adopted an Action Plan and is prompting its Member States to transpose the provisions into national law. On getting hold of this information, the Fair-wood Campaign began approaching the Japanese government and industry at once. As a result of these efforts, a group of government and industry members, including members of the Diet, visited the UK on a study tour in early January and there is now a movement, led by the Forestry Agency, which seeks to implement regulatory measures to eliminate illegally produced timber from the government procurement process.

The third example deals with promoting green procurement by private corporations and consumers. The objective here too is to preserve the world’s forests. We also aim to promote awareness of the fact that the consumption trends of the Japanese have an impact on forest conservation in Japan and throughout the world. In this connection, we have now what is called a Green Procurement Network (GPN) and “Green Procurement Guidelines” have been established by corporations, municipalities, and NGOs. These guidelines simply show, on a product-by-product basis, the extent to which the environmental load of various products ranging from stationery to consumer appliances to automobiles has been reduced and provide consumers with recommendations on energy-saving products,

fuel-efficient automobiles, etc.

Fair-wood’s intense campaigning has led to the recent launch of the “Paper Procurement Study Group”. We make it our business to check on the origin of wood chips used to make pulp for paper. Copy paper sold in Japanese supermarkets today is a cause of deforestation in Sumatra, Indonesia. Our objective, therefore, is to have paper manufacturers guarantee that the forests in which their pulp materials originate are sustainable forests. Paper products in circulation normally only carry labels showing the percentage of recycled paper used in their manufacture; our idea is to eventually have products labelled to clearly indicate what kind of forests the pulp material comes from. Forty percent of Japan’s import in forest products is material for paper pulp. NGOs and citizens’ organizations have long made appeals to increase the percentage of recycled-paper use. While citizens’ organizations have played a large role in this regard, Friends of the Earth Japan takes the movement one step further beyond promoting use of recycled paper; it is now focusing its efforts on “greening” virgin

pulp.

Finally, I would like to touch upon the relationship between our campaign and the EU. European NGOs have been active long before we have with regard to green procurement, especially the green procurement of timber and paper. Therefore, we have had various contacts with European NGOs and governments on many occasions. People living in Japan may think that conservation of the world’s forests is something that takes place in some far away part of the world and not something in which they can participate, even if they wanted to. However, you can start taking part in environment protection activities by asking the seller, when you buy some timber or paper, about the origin of the timber, about the origin of the paper, and from what kind of tree the products are made. From there on, citizens’ organizations and NGOs like our own can make sure that your concerns are heard by industry and government. This is the role of civil society—to convey the voice of the general consumer to government and industry so that appropriate legislation can be passed. ●



Japanese Environmental NGOs from a European Perspective

Wilhelm Vosse

Associate Professor, International Christian University



The state of a country's environmental movement is an important indicator of the strength of its civil society, as concern for the natural environment shows concern in the community as a whole. The Japanese environmental movement appears to be relatively weak, politically insignificant and poorly supported. Indeed, the average membership size of environmental NGOs in Japan is under 100, and even the largest has a membership of no more than 55,000. About two-thirds have an annual budget of under US\$5000, even the larger organizations have only a budget of up to about US\$10 million. What is the role or function of an environmental NGO in a highly industrialized democracy? Where are the strengths and weaknesses of Japanese in comparison to European environmental movements? To address these questions we must consider three central functions of environmental movements in general.

First, discovering and naming environmental risks or problems based upon independent scientific research. Second, linking the scientific community and its discoveries with society at large and raising awareness (political communication). Third, defending claims in the public and political sphere against vested interests which will seek to challenge environmental messages.

How well do Japanese environmental NGOs perform these roles and functions, and how do they compare with their European counterparts? Considering the first role of environmental movements - the discovery of environmental problems and their ability to understand the significance of certain natural scientific findings - Japanese NGOs are not faring very well. Independent environmental research needs money and expertise, and despite the fact that there is limited expertise available within Japanese environmental NGOs, there are very few effective independent environmental think tanks or research facilities. Almost all are either government or industry funded and controlled. The lack of independent

research was first evident in the case of the Minamata mercury poisoning in the 1950s and 1960s. Despite the fact that a Kumamoto University professor had discovered the link between the mercury in sea water and fish and the victims' symptoms very early on, his findings were not published and not brought to the attention of the Minamata victims and their movement organizations. Had independent environmental think tanks or laboratories existed, they might not only have found this link, but would also have informed the public, and hence made the case of the victims much stronger. The situation in Europe is considerably different. In Germany, for example, independent environmental think tanks and research institutions were founded in the 1980s. These institutions not only react to imminent environmental problems, but are also able to do long-term research and then inform the public about potential environmental or health hazards. Once these independent think tanks exist, other public and private institutes do not want to be left behind, but have to catch up and possibly change their research agenda because the general public now demands more transparency.

When we look at the second function of environmental movements, namely that of communicators between the research community and the society at large, the Japanese environmental movement is in a somewhat better position. Despite the fact that official membership in Japanese environmental NGOs, and particularly in advocacy NGOs, is significantly smaller than in Europe, the existence of less formal channels, ad-hoc movements, and the close network of associations, seems to have facilitated the distribution of environmental pollution-related information and knowledge. In this context, the rise of interest and concern about environmental problems in the 1990s, especially since the UN summit in Rio de Janeiro and the rise of volunteer movements concerned with a wide variety of social issues, could certainly be used as an indicator for an increase of civil society activity in Japan.

An important indicator of the Japanese environmental movement's success in raising environmental awareness can be found in a series of public opinion polls. In an April 2002 Asahi Shimbun opinion poll 80% of the respondents expressed an interest in the natural environment, over 70% thought that the Earth is "sick" when compared to a human being, and 55% were seriously concerned about global warming.

When it comes to actual participation in nature preservation activities, 57% said that they had participated in some form of nature preservation, predominantly waste cleaning-up activities and joined tree planting. Many Japanese even expressed specific requests towards the government. Forty-two% wanted more environmental education, 36% wanted stricter observation of environmental regulations, and 30% more support for volunteer environmental organizations. Overall, Japanese expressed deep dissatisfaction with environmental policies of the government. In another 2000 opinion poll, 73% of Japanese said their government is doing too little to protect the environment, a level that was higher or significantly higher than in Europe. In the United Kingdom, for example, only 50% shared that opinion, in Sweden about 40%, in Germany about 30%, and in the Netherlands about 20%. This tells us that a large majority of Japanese is not only aware and concerned about a number of environmental problems, domestically and globally, but wants their government to take a more active stance.

In the same comparative opinion poll in 2000, Japanese expressed a very high level of concern about nuclear energy. More than 60% thought it was likely or very likely that an accident in a nuclear power station will cause long-term environmental damage across many countries in the next five years. This figure was higher than in any European country. In Germany, for example, only about 45% share the same concern, about the same percentage as in the United States. Only the United Kingdom shared similarly high levels of concern about nuclear energy as Japan. A survey conducted by the Asahi Shimbun in 2002 came to similar conclusions: very high levels of concern in Japan. Overall, we can say, that Japanese civil society, and certainly to some extent the many small and medium-sized environmental groups have been successful in raising environmental awareness in Japan, which is in some instances, higher than in Europe.

The third function of environmental movements is the ability of drafting policy proposals, and to defend their stands in the political sphere, often in opposition to other interest groups or stakeholders. That environmental protection is important and that we should all appreciate the environment and its many species is no longer disputed by any serious political actor. What is disputed, however, is the ways and means, or the policies and concrete steps. In Europe, citizens' movements in the 1970s realized that it was essential to have a parliamentary presence, so green or ecological political parties were founded and eventually elected into several national governments, and then also into the European Parliament. In Japan, on the other hand, there is no green or ecological party of any significance. Although there have been some attempts to set up such parties and to get them elected at least on the prefectural level, so far, they have not been successful, particularly not in national politics. Reasons for the nonexistence of a Green Party might be found in the election system, party finance, and certainly the general problem of new parties being successful in any country. However, there are more important factors present in Japan:

First, the Japanese environmental movement is organized into tens of thousands of small groups and organizations. It lacks an efficient network or roof organization that is active nationwide and which could function as a lobby group to members of parliament or the government. In part, I blame movement leaders for being unwilling or incapable of coming together to share power and responsibility.

Second, there are certainly also structural reasons, especially the under-funding of NGOs, and hence, the difficulty of setting up and maintaining a nationwide network. Running an actual political campaign is certainly also quite difficult without sufficient funding. And thirdly, the general public overwhelmingly still considers issues such as peace or environmental protection as non-political issues that should not be dragged into party politics. Volunteer movements, cleanup activities, hands-on or direct involvement in the protection of the environment is widely appreciated; party politics, on the other hand, does not have the same positive connotation. Environmental movement members and leaders might also fear that their movements will lose some of the positive image that they now enjoy, since political parties and their

members have to make deals and compromises.

Does the fact that in Japan, the comparatively weak national representation of environmental interests and the lack of an effective green or ecological party mean that the influence of the Japanese environmental movements on environmental politics has also been weak? The simple answer is: no! A country's environmental policies are not a good measurement for the political efficacy of their environmental movements. If we look at the last 15 years, it is easy to conclude, that Japan's environmental protection measures have been at least as successful as those of their European counterparts, in many cases even more so. The simple comparison of CO2 emission per unit of GDP shows that Japan's level is at about 0.4 tones per 1000 US\$ GDP (1998), which is below the OECD average and similar to those in most EU countries. SOx emission per unit of GDP is significantly lower than in OECD Europe (Japan: 0.3 kg/1000 US\$, OECD Europe: 1.8 kg/1000US\$). The generation of household and municipal waste is another case in point, where Japan fares even better than most EU countries. And finally, the very recently published 2005 Environmental Sustainability Index, a benchmark national environmental stewardship, published just last week by the Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy and the Center for International Earth Science Information Network at Columbia University, ranks Japan at 30th place, one above Germany, which is 31st place.

As far as European countries are concerned, Finland and Norway ended up number one and two, Sweden at number 4, Austria at number 10. But many European

countries ended up far lower down the scale, Italy 69, Spain 76, and Belgium 112. Summing up we can say that Japanese environmental movements are small in terms of membership, severely under-funded, legally still not fully recognized, handicapped by lack of information from governmental institutions and the shortage of independent think tanks, fragmented into many small movements, of which many are dealing simply with one issue, and are only active at the local level, and that they are under-represented on the national stage. Nevertheless, since their beginning as victims' movements and their first successes in the early 1970s, Japanese environmental NGOs have experienced a kind of revival in the 1990s, and have certainly contributed to an increased awareness and concern about domestic, as well as global environmental issues.

Japanese environmental policies have been at least as successful as those of some European countries. This is explained only in part by the existence of the domestic environmental movement, and more by a combination of foreign pressure and international competition, and also advances in Japanese environmental and pollution technologies, which Japan is now selling throughout the world. Civil society in Japan, rather than being an adversary to state or government institutions, is today better described as a partner that attempts to raise awareness about specific issues and offers assistance in the local implementation of policies that need public support. European movements have developed research as well as policy wings, whereas Japanese movements are weak in both of these areas, but have shown ability to raise environmental awareness from the grass-roots and community level. ●



Democracy and the Role of Citizens' Movements in Eastern Europe



Jörg Forbrig

German Marshall Fund of the United States

Having been born in East-Germany and having witnessed in 1989 what civil society is able to achieve, I have spent the better part of the last two decades living and working in various countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and I have been able to closely follow the recent development of democracy, civil society and NGOs in these post-Communist countries. I have been fortunate to do so from both the perspectives of practitioner – through my own work with NGOs in the region – and from the position of researcher.

Currently, I am even allowed to wear both hats simultaneously – based in Bratislava, Slovakia, I am a programme officer with the German Marshall Fund of the United States, which is an American public policy and grantmaking institution that, among others, closely works with and supports NGOs in post-communist Europe. And it is also this part of the world that informs my brief intervention here.

In Central and Eastern Europe in recent years, we have witnessed some breathtaking developments that have again brought to the fore the question of democracy and the role that citizen movements, NGOs and civil society can play for democracy – hence precisely the relationship this forum wishes to reinforce. These developments I would like to bring to your attention – against this backdrop, I will then suggest a number of insights they provide.

The developments I have in mind are a series of democratic revolutions that have taken place in Central and Eastern Europe in the last few years. Most recently, as many of you will be aware, Ukraine has undergone a democratic turnaround that quickly became known as the “orange revolution.” You will have seen the pictures of large, orange-clad crowds taking to the streets of Kiev and other major cities. You will have seen the pictures of young people setting up a tent city in Kiev's central boulevard, where they

held out in the freezing cold for more than one month demanding free and fair elections and a renewal of democracy in their country. And finally, you will have followed the triumph of this democratic movement when President Yushchenko was inaugurated publicly before hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians a little over a week ago.

These events in Ukraine, I would argue, are but the latest example for a renewed and broad-based quest for democracy in Central and Eastern Europe. In 2003, the so-called “rose revolution” resulted in the democratic election of President Saakashvili in Georgia, and in an enhanced democratic reform process since. In 2000, Serbian citizens ended the reign of President Milosevic and returned democracy to their country. And in 1998, a civic movement in Slovakia overturned the semi-authoritarianism of the Meciar government and opened the way for a rapid reform process that led the country into European Union and NATO last year. This wave of democratic changes has once again put to the fore the role of citizens, NGOs and civic movements in asserting freedom and democracy. This becomes clearer from a closer look at some characteristic features of these democratic breakthroughs.

First is a very comparable context of defective democracy. Democracy in those countries had become an institutional façade without a normal democratic process. The basic institutions of democracy, such as elections, parliaments, parties, courts, associations, exist but they are subject to semi-authoritarian control, manipulation, intimidation and persecution by the incumbent power holders.

This pseudo-democratic context is important. These regimes upheld a claim to democracy, in the first place for the purpose of international recognition. This claim limited their ability to suppress democracy

fully and to close off their societies. Gradually, this led to the emergence of some truly democratic islands, such as a parliamentary opposition, courageous journalists or court judges. Citizens could, if with difficulties, form NGOs. Societies were not closed off internationally – people could travel, study and work abroad, access to media alternative to the officially sanctioned ones was possible, varied forms of international contacts and co-operation existed. Over time, these democratic islands became the driving force to return to a more genuine democracy.

This return is best illustrated by the very vehicle used for a democratic breakthrough – all these democratic changes centred around elections. So much so that some have come to describe these events as “electoral revolutions” or even “revolections”. Elections came to be the moments when the democratic façade and less-than-democratic practice contrasted most starkly, when electoral fraud, intimidation of political opponents and populism made the most obvious mockery of the citizens’ right to a free and fair vote. Not surprisingly, it was exactly this contrast, and the electoral context that brought it out so clearly, that became instrumental for democrats.

A clear democratic alternative was the next element shared by Slovakia and Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine. Changes through elections could only succeed when a credible political force emerged that made a return to democracy its primary programme, and when democracy got a face, be it Yushchenko, Saakashvili, Kostunica or Dzurinda. The establishment of such a democratic alternative, and the eventual choice of a candidate, was usually preceded by years of complicated and piecemeal coalition-building across diverse political forces, with parliament and civil society typically being the primary venues.

This political alternative was accompanied by broad-based civic mobilization in the run-up to the elections. As said, basic structures of civil society could develop even in those pseudo-democracies. Over several years, these NGOs, civic networks and platforms grew into the infrastructure needed for civic mobilization, as well as the breeding ground for new political leaders. In the run-up to elections, this infrastructure assumed critical importance – NGOs carried out projects aimed at voter education and participation, at monitoring of the media and of the elections themselves, and at mobilization of protest whenever a free and fair

election was at risk of manipulation by the authorities, as in the case of the tent city in Kiev recently. These civic campaigns, usually non-partisan and often highly co-ordinated across numerous NGOs, came to be the crucial ingredient for successful democratic change.

Within civil society, an overriding role was played by young people, much more so actually than in 1989. Examples include as Pora in Ukraine, Khmara in Georgia or Otpor in Serbia. Their creativity and, at times, militance, not only contributed to an above-average youth participation in the elections but also lent a special flavour and style to these democratic breakthroughs.

These domestic factors – democratic islands, elections, a political alternative, civic mobilization, and strong youth groups – needed to come together to make democratic change possible, and they were facilitated by several international factors. Foreign donors, both private and public, provided material resources. Advocacy groups provided training and skills, often transferring experiences with running election-related projects in similar circumstances. Foreign governments and international organizations pressed for a free and fair electoral process, sent election observers, and challenged semi-authoritarian governments. These forms of international support cannot be underestimated, although recent discussions on democracy assistance seem to largely overplay their role.

Following such a very similar pattern, I believe that the democratic breakthroughs in the four countries have opened a second chapter in the great story of 1989. I am certain that they will find their continuation in other countries of the region, although I will not venture as far as any prediction as to which country will be next and when.

More importantly for our discussion here, I believe that these breakthroughs and the developments in the four countries since provide excellent examples for how civic movements, NGOs, and civil society more broadly can assert, appropriate and shape democracy that is in jeopardy. What is more, I think that some interesting insights can be drawn from these recent democratic revolutions that may inform our thinking about other contexts and causes.

Firstly, these developments are examples for a

successful dialogue and co-operation among many different sides. Democratic politicians joined forces with civic activists and organizations, domestic NGOs co-operated with foreign partners and donors, foreign governments and inter-governmental organizations backed this striving for democracy.

Second, this dialogue and cooperation did not emerge rapidly nor automatically. It evolved over a number of years; it was the product of piecemeal efforts by many; it suffered setbacks and required concessions. Although difficult and protracted enough, one factor greatly helped to integrate the different side – the existence of a “common enemy”, the non-democratic regime they were running up against.

Thirdly, once democracy is successfully re-asserted, normalcy sets in, energy levels drop, and individuals return to old or assume new roles. Movements can mobilize large numbers of people but this will remain limited to short periods of time. Experience shows that movements also need to consciously de-mobilize, transform and find a more positive mission than mere opposition against semi-authoritarianism. Otherwise, they may become rather destructive “movements without a cause”.

Fourthly, experience in Slovakia and Serbia shows that semi-authoritarianism continues to be a threat and future elections will require a similar democratic, political and civic effort. If the recent rose and orange revolutions were the re-birth of democracy in Georgia and Ukraine, the next elections will be their baptism.

Fifthly, the nature of relationships across the different sides changes once the primary goal of a democratically-elected government is achieved. Joint opposition to non-democratic rule will have to give way to more mature relationships that respects differences. A government whose democratic election was backed by civic groups

will have to make political decisions that will not always be to the liking of NGOs. Civic organizations themselves will discover that they differ and compete. Forms of co-operation and dialogue, and expectations towards it, will have to be adjusted if former partners are not to end up at odds with one another.

Sixthly, the primary impulse for these democratic developments was successful because it came from within. International partners eventually added their support. From other countries, we know that this dynamic can also be reversed, with foreign democratisers aiming to build a democratic constituency and coalition in a given country. Such external “imposition”, however, is likely to fail.

Lastly, the democratic dialogue and co-operation always also needed to assert itself against a less-than-democratic “counter dialogue”. Not only democrats but also non-democrats can establish associations or mobilize the public. We can currently, and in response to the breakthroughs I described, observe debates in several pseudo-democracies about strategies to avert such democratic developments. Any civil dialogue will also have to engage with those less civil voices and minds.

Some of these remarks may sound somewhat sobering. They remind us that a civil dialogue, be it on democracy more broadly or on individual causes more specifically, must not idealize what civic movements, NGOs or civil society can achieve. Instead, they demand a healthy dose of reflection, self-criticism and awareness of the limits of civil society. Only then will we see many more and successful examples of citizens and NGOs engaging in the democratic process. The examples I have cited here are meant to be a source of hope, inspiration and energy for other countries, as well as other causes. In any case, they may help us to conclude this symposium with a note of optimism despite the challenges identified today. ●

Creating a Civil Dialogue: an intellectual dialogue with Europe

Hideko Katsumata

Managing Director and Executive Secretary, Japan Center for International Exchange



In this presentation I will discuss the experiences of the Japan Center for International Exchange (JCIE), in relation to dialogue and cooperation.

While the international environment of globalization has brought about various changes, bringing the world closer together and making information instantaneously available, it is my view that between Japan and Europe there still lies some distance, both in a psychological and physical sense, as well as in degrees of development. In this regard, I believe that unless we make a conscious effort to promote dialogue and co-operation, we cannot, realistically speaking, have a meaningful exchange. Between the years of 1975-99, sixteen Europe-Japan Conferences were organized by the JCIE. This involved a variety of dialogues with major research facilities and researchers in Europe and Japan and began initially with trying to make clear our common agenda and to understand each other's awareness of the situation. Ultimately, the focus of the discussion lay in how Europe and Japan should maintain relations with the two superpowers, i.e. the Soviet Union and the United States. It was after the end of the Cold War that we saw the emergence of dialogue between Europe and Japan in a somewhat broader sense. The end of the Cold War brought with it various changes in the economic environment and in the balance of powers, so issues pertaining to economic relations such as trade friction and the North-South problem also were major topics for dialogue. Even in those days, however, these topics continued to be addressed through theoretical dialogue.

The 90s were a period in which we continued to search for common topics to explore with regard to how to realize more concrete co-operation between Europe and Japan. The impact of the economic crisis in Asia in the late 1990s was enormous. As we considered, in the post-crisis restructuring of the international order, the

role to be played by Japan as a global partner alongside the US and Europe, it was acknowledged that Japan could not act as the sole representative for the entire Asia region. Japan had to nurture a global partnership within the large framework of Asia and accordingly, we saw our Europe-Japan dialogue develop into a Europe-Asia dialogue. These developments coincide with the changes in the international environment which involved the establishment of various organizations as a follow-up scheme in connection with the launch of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM).

One project in which our organization was involved as a part of this process was the 'Council for Asia-Europe Cooperation'. The first report of this council, which aims to develop policy proposals through intellectual dialogue, notes that the significance of co-operation between Asia and Europe lies in the fact that a variety of dialogues can be held on various levels with both sides on an equal footing, allowing for discussions on the current international environment based on equality not dependence such as relations with the US inevitably are. Most recently, we put together a report last April entitled 'Necessity for Cooperation' and here too, the United States proved to be a focal point. The idea of how Europe-Asia co-operation could be a highly effective way of drawing the US into or back into the realm of multilateral dialogue was considered.

In our day-to-day dialogue with Europe, I believe that it will always be necessary to keep asking ourselves what our common agenda is and what we can do together. One specific project currently in implementation is the 'Gender Agenda', launched in 2000. This project, which concerns itself with how gender balance and gender equality can be realized in our everyday lives as well as in policy decisions, in some ways complements the United Nations World Conference on Women. The

'Gender Agenda' aims to allow people to express freely their views as individuals, and not as representatives of a government, and discuss possible approaches to the issues discussed. The project, which is now in its third phase, began in its initial phase by making a survey of how gender issues are approached in Europe and Asia and how they are reflected in specific policies. The second phase dealt with how gender balance is achieved in the policy decision-making process, with a focus on political participation and economic life. In the third phase of the project, which we entered this year, we decided to take up the topic of economic empowerment. The objective here is not simply to achieve economic empowerment for women; currently, we are conducting case studies in six countries – Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Greece, France, and the Netherlands – on the possibilities of changing, through economic empowerment, the perceptions and systems of our community to which both women and men belong.

This process has shed light on such issues as access to funding, for example, through microcredit, skills

training, and entrepreneurship. It is interesting to note that, while this research is still in its initial stages, I believe that we will see a great increase in common points between Europe and Asia on similar issues. I have only given you one example but I truly feel that it is important to make the effort to find topics on which we can work together concretely and, through dialogue, acquire new information and approaches.

One other plan that we have for the EU-Japan Year of People-to-People Exchanges, is to exchange information on what is happening in international co-operation at the community level. Last June in Barcelona, in co-operation with the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), we organized a conference, 'Connecting Civil Societies', in which a wide range of participants from think tanks, NGOs, labour unions, cultural co-operation organizations, universities, etc., came together to work towards establishing common agendas on a variety of topics. In light of this, it is my view that co-operation between Europe and Japan, or co-operation with Europe by Japan, working together with the people of Asia, has only just begun. ●



Increasing the Input of Civil Society in Mongolia and Beyond

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Civil society is growing in importance in international relations as a means of setting the agenda, achieving specific goals, executing decisions or policies, and monitoring the execution of these decisions. Its role has increased especially since the second half of the 1980's, and in the 1990's, the UN held a series of high-level meetings and summits where civil society was involved in almost every stage of consideration. The Secretary General of the UN put it succinctly when he said that the input of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) is a necessity for the UN, not a choice. Some events have shown that civil society can even, in some cases, be considered a second superpower. One shining example is, of course, the Campaign to Ban Landmines, which has garnered significant international recognition.

In 2000, when the General Assembly adopted the Millennium Declaration, it made specific mention of the role of civil society in attaining the Millennium Development Goals contained in the declaration. It was generally understood that without the participation of CSOs, it would be almost impossible for governments alone to reach their goals by 2015 or 2020. Thus, consultation with CSOs is an important and growing part of global governance.

It plays a particularly crucial and rapidly-expanding role in the area of democratization. For roughly two decades, we have been witnessing the so-called 'third wave' of democratization, marked by a growing belief that democracy is a universal good, that it is the most legitimate and vigorous form of governance thus far, and that it ensures the right of everyone to participate in decision making that affects their lives and their communities. Today, almost two-thirds of the members of the UN now hold elections. Of course, there may be some faults in these elections and not all of these countries may be perfect democracies, but

democratization is nevertheless a powerful trend, and one that is supported by the UN. Levels of political and economic development vary from country to country, but the general trend is to accept elections and other democratic institutions that empower people and that, in theory and in practice, assist societies in becoming more open and representative.

One step in this direction is the International Conference of New and Restored Democracies (ICNRD). It was initiated in 1988 by President Corazon Aquino of the Philippines, who felt that solidarity and exchange of experience among emerging democracies was very important. That first conference, held in Manila, was followed by conferences in Nicaragua, Romania, Benin, and then, at the end of 2003, in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. The UN has been lending its support since 1993, and for the past 12 years has been very supportive of this process. UNU is also working on promoting democracy and it has published a number of very interesting and useful books on democracy promotion.

A total of 119 countries accepted Mongolia's invitation to attend the fifth ICNRD. At the conference, considerable progress was made in reaching global consensus regarding the definition and principles of democracy. Although not all participants could necessarily be considered fully democratic, all 119 agreed to adopt national action plans in support of democracy, hitherto difficult to achieve due to concerns of infringement on national sovereignty. Another innovation was an agreement on the necessity for governments to formulate specific democracy indicators and, in this way, to periodically indicate their progress in the democratization process.

The next ICNRD conference is expected to be in 2006 in Doha, Qatar. This will mark the first time

that a democracy-related conference will be held in the Middle East. Although challenges surely exist, member countries will be working together in order to voice their perspectives and to try to involve as many Middle Eastern countries as possible.

Parallel to this intergovernmental process is the International Civil Society Forum (ICSF), created to involve civil society in global democratization. ICSF-2003 was held in Mongolia just two days prior to the intergovernmental meeting, and had as its main aim the creation of a set of recommendations and its presentation to the members of ICNRD. The result was a number of concrete recommendations, such as legal reform, policy support and tax reform, on how member states can assist civil society. It was also decided that CSOs would work with governments in preparing national action plans, democracy indicators and country information notes.

One country gradually becoming accustomed to a new and vigorous civil society is Mongolia. Since Mongolia accepted democracy in 1990, it has been working to promote and entrench democratic principles in society. It holds regular democratic elections and has a multi-party political system, separation of government powers, a maturing civil society and, despite some difficulties in this regard, a free press. In the past 15 years, civil society has grown substantially in Mongolia—the country now has 3500 registered CSOs. This does not mean that everything is perfect, however; as in many other developing countries, numbers do not tell the entire story. Although we have achieved a great deal, many challenges remain. In a fully democratic society, the role of civil society in development and governance are recognized, respected and fulfilled. In our case this role is recognized, but only partly respected and not yet fully fulfilled. More

work is needed to ensure that CSOs are up to the task and that the state really supports civil society. For example, tax breaks would be a useful way to ensure that CSOs have enough financial resources to conduct their activities. CSOs also suffer from a lack of experience, infrastructure and expertise.

After 15 years of democratic development, Mongolian civil society is making an effort to assess its strengths and weaknesses. It is working now on a national report on the effectiveness of CSOs, which will include social forces analysis and civil society mapping. Most of the country's CSOs are working in the capital and very few are working in the countryside, and this is just one of many facts the effects of which should be examined. The state of civil society is being assessed in four key areas, based on the Civil Society Diamond, an innovative tool for assessing and comparing civil societies around the world. These areas are:

1. The structure of civil society
2. The legal, political and socio-cultural environment in which civil society operates
3. The values civil society represents and propagates
4. The impact civil society has on social and community development as well as on the public policy process

It is hoped that this national report will be adopted in June 2005. This will enable civil society to see which areas need more support and which areas can be strengthened. In this way, civil society in Mongolia can continue to develop into a positive force for change and democratization. This is in line with a global trend towards more responsive governance and greater civil society-government cooperation, as witnessed by initiatives such as the ICNRD and ICSE. ●

The Role of a Strong and Active Civil Society in a Democratic Japan

Tatsuya Yoshioka

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Last year, three hostages were captured in Iraq, including Ms. Nohiko Takato, a volunteer aid worker. At that time, I felt I did my best as an NGO worker to help in securing their release. Recently, a similar situation occurred in Iraq, involving a young man named Shosei Koda who was captured and killed while visiting the war-torn country. Again, I made efforts to help in Koda's release, which included talking with his family, contacting the Arab media network Al-Jazeera, and promoting the idea that Koda had good intentions by being in Iraq at the time of his capture. My organization made great efforts to work with our contacts in Iraq, but unfortunately, Koda was killed. When it was declared that he had been beheaded, I realized this situation was a real crisis and that Japan needed to reevaluate itself as a society.

Comparing Europe with Japan, we observe an interesting difference in public opinion and reaction concerning the hostages in Iraq. Around the same time as Koda's capture, an Italian hostage was released, and the different reactions from the two societies were quite profound. For instance, when the Italian woman was released, she was praised for her courage and the whole nation rejoiced. However, in Japan, the three hostages were victims of great criticism from the public and the media, which made it difficult for the hostages to integrate back into society.

When Koda was taken hostage, his family recalled the criticism that the previously released hostages had experienced. This fear made it impossible for the family to express to the Japanese public that they actually wished for the withdrawal of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces. The fact that Koda's mother feared severe public criticism, should she express her opinion, shows the vulnerability of democracy in Japan. In Europe, this situation for the hostages and for Koda's family would have been entirely different.

In Japan, many believed that Koda, an unknown Japanese man without a full-time job or official business in Iraq, had been careless and was, thus, solely responsible for his own troubles. Personally, I also believe he should not have gone to Iraq, as he was ill-prepared and did not have the means to survive. However, it is essential that we think about the real reason he was there. He wished to see the reality of the circumstances in Iraq, and we can not blame him for having such a desire to learn. In order to have real democracy, it is important to have the freedom to explore one's curiosity. Koda was in Iraq to broaden his horizons, and to explore new values and culture.

Curiosity and motivation are also at the heart of NGO activity. If we lose this sincere motivation, we will no longer have NGOs. Through NGO activity, people are encouraged to learn in-depth about other people and their cultures, gaining the motivation to make a difference, which leads to action. If we rely solely on the Internet or the television for information, and deny people the opportunity to explore other cultures and countries, we risk sacrificing what it truly means to live in a democracy.

Consequently, we should recognize that Japan's response to Koda being killed in Iraq indicates the crisis Japanese democracy is facing. We, the people of Japan, need to learn from our friends in Europe and start to make stronger connections with people outside of Japan. Networking with neighbouring countries is very important. It is essential that we evaluate to what extent we are in cooperation with our neighbours and NGOs, both in and outside of our region. Interaction with civil societies outside of Japan will help us gain perspective regarding our own civil society.

This week we have guests here in Japan for a Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict

(GPPAC) Northeast Asian regional conference. Our guests are from Beijing, Taipei, Ulaanbaatar, Seoul, Hong Kong, Vladivostok, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, Shanghai, Nagoya, Kyoto and the Philippines. Our GPPAC conference represents the willingness of civil society organizations in Northeast Asia to join together to discuss and resolve regional conflicts. This Northeast Asian GPPAC network is simply one step towards creating solidarity between Japan and civil societies abroad.

It is also very important that we discuss our differences and make an effort to understand various points of view. We should continue to exchange dialogue and ideas with neighbours in our region. Our NGO, Peace Boat, brings people together from around the world in the spirit of international friendship and mutual understanding. The Peace Boat provides an opportunity for its participants to meet people face to face in countries across the globe. This type of direct interaction is what Koda had hoped to gain through his travels in Iraq. He wanted a direct experience.

I would like to share a story of one of our Peace Boat participants. One woman met a Cambodian child who had lost part of her face from a landmine explosion, and

was inspired from this encounter to launch a campaign to ban landmines in Cambodia. The Peace Boat landmine abolition campaign began seven years ago, and continues today to assist the Cambodian people in their battle against the disastrous effects of landmines.

I believe that direct encounters with people of different backgrounds and culture, such as Peace Boat provides, can be a starting point for activism. Action is based on exchange. We cannot create change by staying at home and relying on the media to provide us with insight into other worlds. There is no reality in this means of learning. We must leave the comfort of our own familiar societies and create opportunities to meet with and learn from others. Through person-to-person exchanges, new ideas will be born which lead to action.

If civil society is to have power and to benefit democracy, we must believe that we can make a difference. The great variety of strong and active South Korean NGOs have a very positive perspective about being agents for change. I feel very inspired by their motivation and believe that we, as civil society members, can be important agents for democracy and change. ●



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The United Nations University is an organ of the United Nations established by the General Assembly to be an international community of scholars engaged in research, advanced training, and the dissemination of knowledge related to the pressing global problems of human survival, development and welfare. Its activities focus primarily on peace and conflict resolution, the environment and science and technology in relation to human welfare. The University, which launched academic work in 1975, has grown over the past three decades to encompass the UNU Centre in Tokyo, a global network of the UNU research and training centres and programmes, and hundreds of associated and cooperating institutions and scholars.

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About the 2005 EU-Japan Year of People to People Exchanges

The EU and Japan agreed at the 11th EU-Japan Summit in 2002 to designate 2005 the EU-Japan Year of People to People Exchanges. The overall aim of the year is to develop exchanges, contact and understanding between people in Japan and the European Union. The 2005 Year of People to People Exchanges is intended to encourage exchanges and contacts between academic and cultural bodies; civil society organizations; regional and local authorities; business, sports organizations and individual citizens. It also aims to support events and initiatives to promote better mutual understanding of European and Japanese society and culture.

For more information see: <http://jpn.cec.eu.int/english/2005/>

