



New Japan Women's  
Association

# Japanese Women Today

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## **Prime Minister Abe's Rush for Amending the Peace Constitution and Neoliberal Economic Policy Challenged**

### **Angry over the Pension Fiasco, Tax Hikes, Scandals and Gaffes, Japanese People Said "No" to the LDP-Komei Coalition Government**

#### **Now Is the Time to Gather Together to Fight Increasing Poverty and Defend Article 9!**

#### **Japan under the Abe Government**

In the House of Councilors Election held on July 29 2007, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party suffered a crushing defeat. Prime Minister Abe Shinzo's Cabinet started in late September 2006 with 65 percent of public support. Only ten months later, its approval rating is below 30 percent, while the disapproval rating exceeds 50 percent. The election result clearly shows that the Japanese public, who placed their hope in the Abe Cabinet on its inauguration, now see with anger and bitterness into its true character and danger of its intention to revise the Constitution.

#### ***Forced Passage of Adverse Bills, Abe Cabinet Running Wild***

In the recent Ordinary Session of the Diet, the ruling LDP and Komei Party railroaded important bills one after another by force of numbers. This



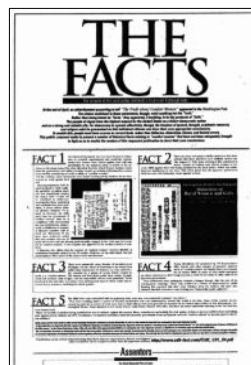
coalition in its "recklessness" is worse than any of the previous governments. The Abe Cabinet, dominated by the pro- Yasukuni ministers who glorify Japan's past war of aggression and colonial rule of Asian nations, calls for a "breakaway from the postwar regime," and devotes itself to remaking Japan as a country waging war together with the U. S. It is now pushing ahead with measures including legislation to realize its goals.

The Abe Cabinet bulldozed through the Diet without taking time for thorough discussions bills that would undermine peace and democracy, and pose threat to people's lives and livelihood. Such bills include the bill to establish procedures for holding a referendum on constitutional revision, the three adverse education bills to strengthen the state's control over school education, the bill to promote realignment of U.S. forces in Japan with the aim of reinforcing the Japan- U. S. military alliance, the bill to revise the Special Measures on Iraq to extend the dispatch of Japan's Self-Defense Forces to Iraq to assist the U.S. forces, and the bill to abolish the Social Insurance Agency for its privatization.

#### ***Abe Cabinet Lacks Political Ethics: Minister Implicated One after Another in Corruption Scandals and Made Outrageous Remarks***

A string of government scandals and gaffes have fueled people's anger. Early February, Hakuo Yanagisawa, Minister of Health, Labor, and Welfare, referred to women as "birth-giving machines." In May, Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries Minister Matsuoka Toshikatsu committed suicide while being under fire for suspicion of falsified office expenses and of involvement in a bid-rigging scandal of the Japan Green Resources Agency. It was revealed immediately after his successor Akagi Norihiko took office that he too had allegedly filed falsified political funds reports. On July 3, Defense Minister Kyuma Fumio resigned for his outrageous remarks that the U.S. atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were inevitable. Foreign Minister Aso Taro, comparing the rice price in Japan and China, said on July 19 that which is more expensive is so obvious a question that even Alzheimer's disease patients could answer. Prime Minister Abe has continued to defend these ministers, showing no political will to correct the wrongdoings.

Worse still, Prime Minister Abe's remarks that there was no evidence to prove coercion involved in wartime "comfort women" cases, and the opinion advertisement inserted in Washington Post under joint signature of pro-Yasukuni Dietmembers both from the LDP and the Democratic Party, sparked strong criticism both at home and abroad, including in the U.S., Japan's closest ally.



***Pro- Yasukuni Force leading Backlash against Gender Equality and Intervention in Education***

The Abe Cabinet is led by the pro-Yasukuni force, a group of Yasukuni Shrine worshippers, the center propagandizing justification for Japan's past war of aggression. Among 18 Abe Cabinet members, 12 are in the Japan Conference Dietmembers' Council, a pro-Yasukuni parliamentarians' organization, and Prime Minister Abe himself was the deputy secretary general of the council until 2005.

The pro-Yasukuni force is intensifying backlash against efforts



for gender equality, advocating a family system and family ties to sustain "war-waging nation." The government has adversely revised the Basic Law for a Gender-equal Society, " unanimously approved in the Diet in 1999, and is now trying to chip it away. Pro-Yasukuni local council members are carrying out signature drives urging that the Basic Law should be repealed on the ground that it helps to increase divorce, to discourage women to have children, and to undermine the foundation of the family.

In the field of education, the move to " foster children to be " citizens who can serve the war-waging nation" is moving ahead. The Junior Chamber International Japan (JCI) produced an animation DVD video entitled " Pride, " which glorifies Japan's past war of aggression as a "war for self-defense and the liberation of Asia." It was then revealed that the Education Ministry decided to sponsor an education program using this video nationwide. NJWA, together with parents and teachers immediately took actions protesting the decision, saying, "Don't teach children ideas that contradict historical facts." Facing the strong objection, the JCI canceled the contract with the Education Ministry for the education program using that DVD. However, it still intends to push forward with independent video showings in communities, and the campaign against the DVD should continue until the JCI finally gives up.

***Increasing Poverty and Social Disparities***

Poverty and widening gap between the rich and the poor are more serious than ever. Tragic incidents have taken place such as a 52- year old man starving to death after the municipal government cut off his welfare, or a husband forcing his wife in

the seven months of pregnancy and their two small children to die with him in despair about hard living.

The number of the deaths from starving jumped in 1995 from some twenty in the previous year to 61, and in these eleven years 867 people died from hunger.

Background to this is the government's policy in response to the financial circles to destroy employment and wages, and to cut social security including welfare benefits and various tax deductions. In 2006, the overall unemployment rate was 4.1 percent, marking a sharp rise from the level of 2 percent in 1994. The number of non-regular workers exceeded 10 million in 2006, and has reached 16.75 million by 2006. One out of three workers, and one of two women or young workers are temps. Child-rearing allowance for single-female-parent households, whose average income is less than 40 percent of that of the two-parent families, has been cut.

The Abe Cabinet has been pushing ahead with policies to discard the socially vulnerable, which have resulted in a rapid growth of the working poor; "Internet-café refugees," young people who cannot afford to pay housing rents even though they work hard every day; and "medical refugees" and "nursing-care refugees" among the elderly who are excluded from public medical or nursing services because they don't have money. The government must be held responsible for such grave situation emerging in Japan, a "major economic power."

Resentment is simmering among the Japanese people over the "lost pension," that is, many pension holders and those who are enrolled in a pension plan are blocked from receiving pension benefits due to the missing pension premium payment records. People are also angry at the substantial residential tax increase because of the abolition of the fixed-rate tax cuts, while large companies are benefited from tax breaks. Furthermore, the government plans to put the consumption tax rate increase on the table in the upcoming Diet session this fall.

## *NJWA's Work under the New Conditions*

The Japanese people are now clear about the dangerous nature of the Abe Cabinet, whose policies are undermining their living conditions, as well as peace and democracy. That is why they voted against the coalition government under Prime Minister Abe. NJWA has taken various actions to stop the Abe Cabinet's misgovernment, organizing nationwide campaigns, staging sit-ins in front of the Diet building, lobbying lawmakers and visited the Diet in session, or organizing protests. The newly elected Senators will decide whether or not to propose the Constitutional amendment. The biggest opposition Democratic Party, now holding a majority in the Upper House, is no different from the LDP in advocating the constitutional revision. The movement to defend the Constitution is entering a crucial stage. As a women's NGO upholding "opposition to the adverse constitutional revision and to resurgence of militarism" as one of the organization's objectives, NJWA will do its utmost to develop unity and cooperation with women at home and worldwide to preserve our Peace Constitution as it is for a peaceful world without nuclear weapons and military bases.

## **International Conferences**

### *First International Meeting on the Base Issue*

### *International Conference for the Abolition of Foreign Military Bases (March 5-9, 2007 in Quito and Manta, Ecuador)*

In Ecuador, a country striking out in a new direction under President Rafael Corea, who was elected to office on a pledge not to renew the agreement for leasing the military base in Manta, the International Conference for the Abolition of Foreign Military Bases was held. In this international gathering, the first and the biggest ever held on the issue of military bases, about 400 activists from 40 countries exchanged information on the military bases and militarization, on damages

of the military presence suffered by the local people, and on struggles in respective countries and regions. They also discussed what kind of network they wanted to have, as well as what strategy and action plans they needed to develop. The participants agreed on working together for abolishing foreign military bases based on the respect for differences in the situations and the autonomy of the movements in each country and region. They confirmed the importance of supporting local activism and struggle. They adopted a declaration announcing, "United by our struggle for justice, peace, self-determination and ecological sustainability, we have founded a network animated by the principles of solidarity, equality, openness, and respect for diversity."

At the call of the Japan Peace Committee, 12 activists including two NJWA representatives formed a Japanese delegation. Together with some from other groups, more than 20 Japanese activists attended the Conference. Each of them made a great contribution to the Conference making presentations at the plenary meetings and workshops, where they informed the participants from different countries about the realities of military presence in Japan, the on-going campaigns against the realignment of U.S. military bases, and their own experiences in the effort of developing unity and cooperation between people and movements of different background.

On March 8, the International Women's Day, the participants carried out a Women's Caravan for Peace, from Quito, a city standing 2800 km above sea level, to the coastal city of Manta, traveling about 700 km across the Andes in 6 buses. Along the way, they were welcomed by the people of Chone, Portoviejo and Montecristi, neighboring municipalities of Manta,



where the military base is located, in the province of Manabi. In Chone, ONISHI

Teruo, an activist from Nago, Okinawa, gave his solidarity message to the International Women's Day and spoke of the struggle in



Okinawa. In Portoviejo, three Japanese women from the Japanese Delegation addressed to the audience in Japanese, Spanish and English, congratulating the International Women's Day and extending solidarity with sisters and brothers in Manta, Ecuador and the world over.

On 9th, after the public meeting in Manta, 500 people, young ones in the forefront, marched 7 km to the base, chanting "No Bases!"

### *8th Asian Solidarity Conference for the Issue of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan May 19- 21, 2007 in Seoul, Republic of Korea*

At a time when Japan's Prime Minister Abe said in a Diet deliberation that there was no proof that government forced women from Asia and elsewhere to work as sex slaves for the Japanese military, while railroaded through the Diet a national referendum bill to establish procedures for revising the Constitution, a dangerous step toward making Japan a war-waging nation, the Eighth Asian Solidarity Conference for the Issue of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan was held in Seoul, from May 19 to 21. 200 people from different countries gathered, and from Japan 48 representing 25 Japanese groups, including NJWA President TAKADA Kimiko, attended the Conference. Many participants criticized the Japanese government for its attempts to revise Article 9 in an effort to drive Japan back to the war state as it was during World War II.

The Conference heard the testimonies of women from ROK, DPRK, China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia and the Netherlands, who are survivors of the Japan's military sexual slavery. All those testimonies were irrefutable evidence of how groundless Prime Minister Abe's refusal to admit

the involvement of the Japanese military in the "comfort women" system. A South Korea's harmoni (grandmother), Lee Young-soo, said to NJWA President Takada, "Prime Minister Abe repeatedly says that there is no proof of coercion in recruiting women, but I am the living witness. I want him to invite me to the Japanese Diet to speak. I heard that he apologized to U.S. President Bush, but these two guys are the ones undermining world peace. He should beg my pardon on his knees," "I do hope that Japan faces up to its past and preserves Article 9 as it is no matter what, because Article 9 is a common treasure to Koreans, Japanese and people in the whole Asia."

In her remarks at the Conference, Takada informed the participants that NJWA members all over Japan immediately took to the street to protest against the right-wing remarks made by Prime Minister and other cabinet ministers trying to whitewash the facts of Japan's war of aggression, and that more than 6,000 Article 9 Associations had been established and the movement to defend the Constitution was developing at the grassroots level.

She emphasized that to get the Japanese government to apologize and provide compensation to the survivors would be a great contribution to the effort to defend our war-renouncing Constitution.

The campaign calling for early settlement of the former Japanese "comfort women" issue is developing in the U.S., Germany, Australia, the Philippines and many other parts of the world. An eloquent example of this is the adoption of the Resolution 121 by the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs on June 27 urging the Japanese government to apologize formerly for coercing thousands of women to work as sex slaves for its WW II military. More than 140 lawmakers from both political parties had agreed to co-sponsor the resolution, which was endorsed overwhelmingly by the Committee and by the full House on July 30. In Canada, the sub-committee of the Parliament has passed a resolution of like character, and the Australian lawmakers are considering following their counterparts in the U.S. and Canada. Prime Minister Abe's attempt to make Japan a "war-

waging nation" is now encountering opposition worldwide.

The Eighth Asian Solidarity Conference adopted a resolution criticizing the Japanese government for its move to revive the war state by revising Article 9.

The resolution proposes to develop the spirit and the achievements of the Conference that started 15 years ago to support harmonis, who had courageously spoke out, into an international solidarity meeting, and calls for initiatives to launch various campaigns such as marking August 8 as "Day of Global Solidarity."

### ***First International Meeting against Nuclear Weapons in Seoul***

### ***East Asian Peace Conference against War, Nuclear Proliferation***

***May 26&27, 2007, Seoul, Republic of Korea***

East Asian Peace Conference against War, Nuclear Proliferation, the first international meeting to be held in Republic of Korea, took place in Seoul on May 26 and 27. Of about 230 participants, 130 were from Japan, including the Japan Council against Atomic & Hydrogen Bombs (Japan Gensuikyo) Delegation with 103 people. Many NJWA members from the head office and different prefectural chapters joined the Gensuikyo Delegation. One U.S. activist also participated. The idea of holding this Conference emerged from Korean activists and groups for peace, democracy and social justice, who wanted to launch a campaign against nuclear weapons in the face of North Korea's nuclear testing.

The plenary meeting had two sessions, "Denuclearization of East Asia and the Anti-Nuke Movement," and "Increasing Militarization in East Asia and the Peace and Anti-War Movement." In the first session, Lim Pil-soo, Executive Committee Chief of People's Solidarity for Social Progress, TAKAKUSAKI Hiroshi, Secretary General of Japan





Gensuikyo, and Anne Miller, Secretary General of New Hampshire Peace Action (U.S., an invitee of the Women's Peace Fund to the 2006 World Conference against A & H Bombs) made presentations.

Lim pointed out that in South Korea there was an argument among the progressive force to defend North Korea's nuclear testing, while conservatives were advocating for possessing nuclear weapons as countermeasure against North Korea. He then called for people's concerted effort for developing the movement against war and nuclear weapons.

Takakusaki said that to counter the unjust threat from a nuclear weapons state by going nuclear means to take part in the nuclear arms race holding the survival of humanity as hostage, and proposed a united effort to promote a movement for the abolition of nuclear weapons in Asia, now that the voice calling for nuclear abolition forms majority in the international community. He stressed the importance of getting the Japanese government to observe Article 9 and the Three Non- Nuclear Principles, and to make a declaration of a "Nuclear Weapon-Free Japan" both in the Diet and at the United Nations General Assembly.

Anne spoke of the actual situation of the U.S. public, who were ignorant and not informed of the damage caused by nuclear weapons and what was going on outside the U.S. She also said that with Democrats holding a majority in the Congress, and the candidates for presidential election in 2008 starting their campaigns, peace activists had significant opportunity to push nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation issues into the public discourse and to shift candidates' positions to better reflect what they want: a world free of genocidal nuclear weapons.

On 27, following 7 workshops on such themes as " East Asia: Solidarity for Peace and against Nuclear Weapons," " Present Conditions and Challenges of the Anti-base Movement in East Asia," and " Assistance and Compensation to Hibakusha," participants gathered in the closing ceremony. They confirmed the success of the Conference, and adopted the " Declaration of the International Conference." At the proposal of Japan Gensuikyo, reference to the assistance for Hibakusha (survivors of the atomic bombing) was included in the Declaration. This will greatly encourage Korean Hibakusha, who have long had difficulties in speaking out due to the complex and mixed public sentiments in their society. It will also contribute to the effort for raising public opinion and developing the anti-nuclear movement in South Korea. Finally, the Conference participants joined the rally against the expansion of the U.S. base in Pyongtaek in front of the Yongsan Air Base. On behalf of the Japan Gensuikyo Delegation, secretary general of Kanagawa Gensuikyo addressed the 300 participants. He spoke of the campaign in Yokosuka City, Kanagawa Prefecture against the deployment of a U. S. nuclear- powered aircraft carrier at Yokosuka Port, and expressed solidarity with the struggle of farmers and citizens of Pyongtaek

NJWA members attending the Conference had a wonderful opportunity to have a dialogue with two representatives of Women Making Peace, Kim Jeongsoo and Jun Gyung-Lan, both of whom had participated in the Japan Mothers Congress at the invitation of the Women's Peace Fund and have since maintained ties with NJWA. About 20 women including Anne learned from the two, who had just come back from North Korea, about what they had seen there and the effort of women for a peaceful unification of Korea.

