# Japanese Women Today

No.40
August 2016



New Japan Women's Association

Address: 5-10-20, Koishikawa, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo JAPAN
Phone: +81-3-3814-9141, Fax: +81-3-3814-9441
E-mail: s-intl@shinfujin.gr.jp http://www.shinfujin.gr.jp


## *Scrap War Legislation, Bring Back Constitutionalism, Respect For Human Dignity*
## *United, We Are Powerful, Together, We Can Make a Difference!*

# Building on the Achievements of Cooperation among Citizens and Opposition Parties, Women Fight on to Stop Abe Government's Reckless Policies

## New Initiatives of Citizens to Change Politics

### First Step Forward

The House of Councilors' Election held on July 10 proved to be a historical step forward for the new initiatives of citizens and the four opposition parties - the Democratic Party (DP), the Japanese Communist Party, the Social Democratic Party, and the People's Life Party & Taro Yamamoto and Friends – cooperating in the election to stop the Abe government's reckless policies. United around the banner of "Repeal War Laws and Restore Constitutionalism, Eliminate Poverty and Income Inequality, and Respect for the Dignity of the Individual," the opposition camp put up a good fight throughout the election campaign and it keeps it up into the Tokyo Gubernatorial Election scheduled for July 31.

The opposition parties succeeded in fielding unified candidates in all 32 constituencies where only one seat was up for grab, and won in the 11 of them. Given the fact that the opposition parties only had 2 candidates elected in those constituencies in the previous Upper House Election, the result this time was a huge progress. In particular, the loss of the Liberal Democratic Party's sitting ministers in Okinawa and Fukushima Prefectures, and the victory of joint opposition candidates in the Tohoku (northeast) region, represent strong anger and frustration of local people suffering from the US military presence, the damage of the Great East Japan Earthquake and the nuclear accident, and the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade pact.

The voter turnout was 54.7%, 2.1 point up from the previous Upper House election, and in most of the constituencies with only one seat contested, the vote cast for the unified opposition candidate exceeded the total votes won by the four opposition parties' proportional representation candidates. This means that the

*Citizens and all four political parties jointly appealed to voters, with the banner that reads: "Politics for All, Now!" July 19, Tokyo*

*Young parents in need of day care facilities for their kids gathered in front of the Diet Building with their messages urging the government and lawmakers to build more facilities of good quality March 5, Tokyo*

electoral alliance had synergy effects that enhanced the opposition camp strength beyond its political base. In these facts, we can find hope and prospects for further advance of the electoral cooperation among citizens' and political parties. Something new and unprecedented that happened was that in each and every constituency including those where multiple seats were up for grab, a broad range of citizens became involved in the election campaign and developed their own initiatives, saying, "We are the ones to change politics."

## Pro-Constitutional Amendment Forces Hold Super Majority in the Diet

With that said, it is critical that the constitutional revision camp – the LDP, Komeito, Osaka Ishin no Kai (Initiatives from Osaka), the Party for Japanese Kokoro and pro-revision independents whose seats were not contested this time – secured a two-thirds majority in the chamber. The LDP-Komeito coalition already has more than two-thirds of the seats in the House of Representatives, so the constitutional revision camp now holds a majority in both chambers for the first time after the end of World War II, now being able to initiate constitutional amendment.

During the election campaign, Prime Minister Abe Shinzo made no mention of constitutional revisions, focusing on the achievements of Abenomics economic policy and how he would make progress. Bowing to the pressure from the government, the media "voluntarily refrained" from reporting on election issues, including PM Abe's ambition to revise the Constitution after the election. They actually discouraged people to go vote by releasing headlines early on that the Abe camp was likely to hold a super majority. However, the absolute rate of vote cast for the LDP was only 18.9%. Voters, despite all those attempts to divert their attention from the real aim of the LDP and its allies, by no means gave them "carte blanche" to go for constitutional revisions. Moreover, in every poll, majority of the respondents oppose to amending the Constitution's Article 9, and it is noteworthy that the number of people who are against amendment under the Abe government is increasing. It is unacceptable for anyone for any reason whatsoever to override public opinion on the Constitution, which forms the very basis of the nation.

*Shinfujin members collecting signatures for Scrapping the War Legislation. The campaign was launched by All-Out Action Committee, with the goal of collecting 20 million signatures and Shinfujin has so far gathered 1.26 million.*

## Women at the Forefront in the Struggle to Stop Abe

In this epoch-making year that marks the 70th anniversary of women's suffrage in Japan, and that those aged 18 and over exercise the right to vote for the first time, the New Japan Women's Association (Shinfujin) made all-out efforts to get the opposition joint candidates in single-seat constituencies elected. Jointly with the Civil Alliance for Peace and Constitutionalism and a broad range of citizens, Shinfujin members throughout Japan took the lead in street publicity and in dialogues with voters, with catchy calls like "Let's Go Vote!" and "Together, We Change Politics!" They also organized in their communities conversation circles called "Election Café," inviting friends and community members to share their concerns about daily lives, families and work, as well as opinions on politics including what political party each of them would support. From these conversation circles, where everyone spoke freely in first

person, Shinfujin members and those who joined them came out with keen eyes for choosing the right candidate or political party to support. The election campaign also provided many women with opportunities to get to know Shinfujin. We often heard those women say that they went to vote for the first time in their lives because they had met Shinfujin and started to think and speak in first person." Shinfujin members are reminded of the role they can play in raising awareness of women and in many places they are receiving new members.

With the super-majority in the Diet in its hand, the Abe government will gear up its attempt to revise the Constitution targeting at war-renouncing Article 9, and will push ahead with its reckless policies including the implementation of war legislation despite the deteriorating security situation in South Sudan where the Self-Defense Forces are dispatched. At the same time, the cooperation between opposition parties will further be strengthened in the Diet. Citizens' grassroots activities will be more important than ever to bring about political change from the bottom up. As peace and women's rights are intricately linked, Shinfujin will continue its utmost to reveal the nature of Abe government, composed of gender backlash people who are exploiting women's concerns to push their own agenda to make Japan a war-waging nation where big companies can make the biggest profits.

*2,000 women staged protest against the rape and murder of a young woman in Okinawa by a former US marine who is a civillan employee at Kaneda Air Base. Shinfujin's Okinawa Chapter members carried the banner that read: "No Impunity!"*

## "Save Takae" Stop State Violence

At 6:00 a.m. on July 11, just ten hours after the polls closed in the Upper House election, in which Okinawa people elected IHA Yoichi, former mayor of Ginowan City who ran as an independent backed by the opposition camp, ousting the State Cabinet Minister, the Okinawa Defense Bureau restarted preparation work for construction of US Marine Corps helipads tio be used by Osprey in Takae, Higashi Village. About 100 riot police and 20 private security guards were mobilized in front of the main gate of the Northern Training Area.

On July 21, 1,600 people gathered in the protest rally in front of the N1zone gate to the NTA, declaring they would unite to resist the helipad construction. The following day, the government sent more than 500 riot police from outside Okinawa to Takae, a small community of only

*Shinfujin Okinawa Chapter leaders brought Takae sisters donations from Shinfujin members all over Japan. ISA Ikuko, leading member of Shinfujin Yambaru-Takae Han, arrying the association banner, received it .*

160 people, to join another 500 of Okinawa Defense Bureau staff, security guards and local police to subdue protesters. They are so violent in treating local people, and the Takae is in the state-of-emergency like situation. ASHIMINE Yukine, Shinfujin member of Takae has witnessed riot police beating people, police vehicle hitting a person and running away, or

police unlawfully checking passersby. She says that the government's high-handed way to oppress people's will goes far beyond Takae, and that Okinawa has reached the end of the line; "Enough is enough." Support for Takae people is growing nationwide, and we need to do more to save Takae and to stop Abe government's outrage.

## Together with Hibakusha, Let Us Achieve a Nuclear Weapon-Free World

In April, 2016, the International Signature Campaign in Support of the Appeal of the Hibakusha for the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons was launched. The appeal, under the title: "Hibakusha Earnestly Desire Elimination of Nuclear Weapons," calls on State Governments to conclude a treaty to ban and eliminate nuclear weapons. It had a strong impact on many people and on July 13, in response to the call of the Japan Confederation of A- and H- Bombs Suffers Organizations (Nihon Hidankyo), a liaison committee to promote signature campaign was formed by many anti-nuke and peace organizations and individuals including Japan Council against A & H Bombs (Gensuikyo) and Japan Congress against A- & H- bombs (Gensuikin). Inspired by Hibakusha's appeal, Shinfujin members in all areas of Japan have started various initiatives under the slogan: "Together with the Hibakusha" and "Together with Next Generation".

In Kyoto, on July 19, eight Shinfujin members including younger generations conducted a signature drive with the Hibakusha in front of the Kyoto Tower.

One of the younger members was 41-year-old NIGA Satomi from Shimogyo Branch and she had participated in the gathering to hear the story of ODAKA Miyoko, a 91-year old Hibakusha living in Kyoto. NIGA says: "I knew about the atomic bombing through writings and books. But it was totally different to hear directly from Odaka-san how people lived their lives back then, and what happened to them when the atomic bomb was dropped. Odaka-san told me that she was not able to give water to those who were desperately begging for it. She also said that at first she could not help but to turn her eyes away from the dead bodies, but then she became used to see them. She couldn't believe to find herself observing those bodies with no feeling." NIGA went on to say, "in today's signature drive, I had a chance to hear another Hibakusha, Hanagaki-san, speaking about her A-bomb experience. Now I do want to learn more and act to convey Hibakushas' messages and to tell others about nuclear weapons." NIGA decided to participate in the World Conference against A & H Bombs in Hiroshima with her children and other members. She looks forward to visiting monuments, and sharing experiences with other participants coming from different part of the world.

In Osaka, Shinfujin members of chatting-and-walking circle of Tondabayashi Branch enjoy walking to various parks in their communities and in other areas. One of the members proposed that they express their desire for peace by walking, so they joined the peace march just coming into their community. More than 20 Shinfujin members walked together, departing from Tondabayasi City Hall full of energy.

Shinfujin has set the goal of collecting 2 million signatures in support of the Hibakusha's Appeal by 2020.

*Shinfujin Kyoto members with Hibakusha*