

Information for the 2008 UPR Review

Federation of Japanese Women's Organizations
(FUDANREN), a Japanese NGO

January 2008

Human Rights of Women in Japan

1. (1) A presentation of the Federation of Japanese Women's Organizations (FUDANREN)

FUDANREN was founded in 1953 and is currently made up of 21 organizations including women's associations and women's sections of trade unions and citizens' groups. These 21 organizations have a total membership of about 900,000 people and act jointly for realizing women's demands. FUDANREN is affiliated with the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF, founded in 1945), an international NGO that has a consultative status with the UN ECOSOC.

2. (2) Information Presented in the Order of the Concluding Comments Included in the CEDAW 2003 Report

Although Japan ratified the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women as early as in 1985, there still remain today various forms of discrimination against women and NGOs are demanding the State ratify the Optional Protocol.

3. In preparing its report on the implementation of the Convention, the Government unilaterally heard NGOs and did not allow any interaction. This form of consultation with NGOs needs to be improved. As the Government of Japan did not submit its Sixth Report by the deadline of submission which was set for July 2006, in the present paper, we are going to present the situation around the human rights of women in Japan in the order of the Concluding Comments included in the CEDAW Report introduced to its 29th session in July 2003 after the Committee's consideration of the 4th and 5th periodic reports of Japan.
4. (i) Stereotyped perception of gender roles (Concluding Comments para. 359-360)

As a result of backlash against gender equality initiated by certain groups and media belonging to or under the influence of the ruling parties, the Second Basic Plan for Gender Equality drawn up in 2005 marked a retreat from its First version: items including reproductive rights, feminist education and gender research were removed from the Plan. In 2006, the Basic Law on Education was revised and the coeducation provision was removed from the Law.

5. Since then the backlash forces have intensified their activities in different localities in the country, launching petition campaigns for the abrogation or revision of the Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society as well as of the Basic Plan for Gender Equality. Their major argument is meant to emphasize the difference in qualities between men and women and to give more weight to the role of the family, the social contribution of housewives and the role of the mother for children during infancy. In this way, they aim at reviving the stereotyped attitudes on women's and men's roles and at virtually denying the sex education by saying that the sex education should be "provided according to the development levels of children".
6. This backlash needs to be countered and the contents of the Third Basic Plan to be developed by 2010 be improved.
7. (ii) Violence against Women (para. 361-362)

We have been consistently demanding the Government that it officially apologize to and compensate the wartime "comfort women" who were forced to serve the Japanese armed forces. In this regard, we fully support the relevant resolution adopted by the European Parliament on December 13th, 2007. In Japan, the opposition parties have introduced many times to the Diet a joint draft bill intended to solve the issue, but it has not yet been adopted due to the resistance of the ruling parties.

8. Sexual harassment is increasing especially on workplaces. For instance, more than 50 percent of female physicians say they have experience sexual harassment (survey conducted by the National Association of Authorized Practitioners). In September 2006, a female self-defense soldier of Hokkaido Air Self-Defense Force reported the case of attempt of rape by a male soldier and was forced to resign. She took her case to the court, but she continues to suffer organizational harassment by the JSDF. A wide range of people are supporting her in her judicial battle as a "trial for human rights of female self-defense soldier".
9. There are as many as 135 U.S. bases in Japan. Women living around these

bases are exposed to increasing violence perpetrated by U.S. servicemen. In January 2007, a drunken U.S. soldier belonging to Yokosuka Base in Kanagawa prefecture located in metropolitan area killed a woman walking on a public street. Her family has filed a suit against the U.S. armed forces and the Government of Japan.

10. (iii) Situation of Working Women (para 369-370)

The wage gap between men and women tends to widen, with female wage accounting for only 65.9 percent of male wage for full-time workers, or 49.8 percent including part-time workers. The main reasons for this are the increase in the number of female workers in precarious employment status and lack of mechanisms to ensure equal treatment between regular and irregular workers. In fact, 55.6 percent of women workers are precarious workers in part-time, temporary or contract jobs (precarious workers, male and female, account for 34.6 percent of the total workforce). They are obliged to work under the pressure of job insecurity, accepting low wage and poor working conditions. 62.8 percent of temporary workers are women. The average hourly wage of women part-time workers account only for 69.7 percent of women full-time workers or 45.9 percent of men full-time workers.

11. The Equal Opportunity Law was revised in 2006 and the Part-time Work Law in 2007, but the correction of indirect discrimination and equal treatment remain unattained goals. The ratification of the ILO Convention on Part-time Labour and enactment of a law that will ensure gender equality in employment are still needed.

12. Just like their male counterparts, women workers are made to work long hours with increasing intensity. Especially nurses, teachers and women workers in industrial production sites find it more and more difficult to combine job and family life. They are exposed to the risks of death from overwork and maternity destruction and the number of women quitting jobs before retirement age because of fear about their health. Labor regulations limiting overtime work, work on holidays and at late night and applied equally to men and women, as well reduction of hours of work are needed.

13. Women in farming families and in small and medium-sized family enterprises and businesses have their health affected because they have to work longer and more intensively or even take a second job to supplement declining income of their families. They are covered by the state-run health insurance that does not compensate the loss of income due to pregnancy, childbirth or disease. They

must be given sickness allowance and maternity allowance similar to allowances provided to salaried workers. In addition, it is necessary to revise the income tax law so as to take into account the remuneration for work of women family workers as wage.

14. (iv) Revision of Discriminatory Legal Provisions (para. 371-372)

Discriminatory legal provisions such as the choice of surname for married couples, discrimination against children born out of wedlock, waiting period required for women to remarry after divorce etc. have not been revised yet. This is partly due to the influence of the backlash forces that claim that revision of the existing laws will destroy “the family”.

15. (3) Other Items

(i) Increasing Poverty and Social Security

Poverty is rampant. The major reasons are low wage levels and degradation of social security. The average poverty rate for the generation of people rearing children is higher than the average of all households: 29.1 percent for the former and 22.3 percent for the latter. The rate is particularly high for single-mother households (87.0%) (estimates by Prof. Michio GOTO, Trsuru-Bunka University). Since 2005, the government has reduced or abolished the additional allowance for single-mother households receiving public assistance. In many Japanese municipalities, single mothers are demanding the revision of this measure and some have taken their cases to the court.

16. There are about one million people who do not have any pension. Nine million others have a basic old age pension (state-run old age pension) whose amount is less than the level of income that qualifies for public assistance. Women represent the majority in both cases. In addition, the average amount of annuity paid by welfare pension funds for employees to women accounts for 57.9 percent of male employees. We are therefore strongly urging the Government to implement the measures recommended by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in August 2001, including the “introduction of minimum pension into the pension system” and “correction as much as possible of the real gap in pension between men and women”.

17. An age-discriminatory health care system such as the “Health Care System for the Late Aged”, a scheme scheduled to be implemented in April 2008, is particularly devastating to low-income aged women. We therefore demand that the planned

system be withdrawn because it would violate the right of women to live healthy throughout their life.

18. (ii) Shortage of Medical Doctors and Women Doctors

There is a serious shortage of obstetricians and expecting mothers have difficulty to find a doctor who assists childbirth. Women with small children are also concerned about the shortage of pediatricians and physicians. The number of doctors is two for 1000 people which is too small for the needs. There are cases of karoshi of doctors due to long working hours and excessive workloads and these cases are officially recognized as occupational accidents. Hospital doctors are not replaced when they take maternity leave. There is no compensation at all for general practitioners for loss of income due to pregnancy or childbirth. Although women account only for 16.4 percent of the total number of doctors, they represent 35.3% of the doctors aged 29 years or under. Support measures for childcare and child rearing are urgently needed so that women doctors can continue to work after childbirth.

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