

Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)  
96<sup>th</sup> Session (6-30, August 2018) for Japan

NGO Report in Relation to Ideology Stated in the Preface of the  
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial  
Discrimination (ICERD)

*The 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Japan's Proposal of Elimination of Racial  
Discrimination within the Committee for Drafting the Covenant of the  
League of Nations at the Paris Peace Conference*

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## **Introduction**

It is a very fortuitous coincidence for Japan that the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) for Japan will be holding its session with the centennial of Japan's initiative to abolish racial discrimination. On February 13, 1919, the Japanese government first made a proposal for racial equality within the committee responsible for drafting the Covenant of the League of Nations at the Paris Peace Conference in Versailles, to the effect that elimination of racial discrimination should be clearly stated in the Covenant. Japan is obviously a pioneer within the international community in this regard. Japan's first proposal was just a half century prior to the enforcement of International Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) in 1969.

Japan is a pioneer in this field because she had suffered racial discrimination for many decades. Japan has been a leader of racial equality movement for a century and will continue to actively contribute, as a pioneer and a leader, in the future.

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) of the United Nations and the government of Japan are kindly requested to heartily acknowledge the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Japan's Proposal of Elimination of Racial Discrimination in February 2019.

## **Japan's Proposal of Racial Equality and Its Background**

Japan endured racial discrimination from Western countries for a very long period of time since she was the only country among non-white countries that succeeded in national modernization and industrialization in the 19th century during the Meiji Period. The year 1890 (Meiji 23) is symbolic of Japan's political and economic modernization. In 1890, the Imperial Constitution, very sophisticated and democratic at that time, formed the basis of Japan's constitutional monarchy and the Imperial Diet was established as well. Also in 1890, the volume of domestic production of industrial goods was greater than that of imported industrial goods for the first time in Japan.

In March 1895, Japan won the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895). Japan was awarded the Liaodong Peninsula including Port Arthur (Lushun) in South Manchuria, by the Treaty of Shimonoseki on April 17, 1895. In other words, Japan obtained the

territory completely within the bound of international law. Immediately after the Treaty of Shimonoseki, however, Japan had to retrocede the Liaodong Peninsula to China because of the Tripartite Intervention of Russia, Germany and France, which were dominant military powers. The Tripartite Intervention, led by Russia, was a classic example of the European Powers' unfair forceful demand that trampled international law.

At the same time, soon after Japan's victory in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), fears of the so-called "Yellow Peril" emerged in Europe. The German Emperor Wilhelm II gifted the allegorical lithograph "Peoples of Europe, Guard Your Most Sacred Possessions" to Russian Emperor Nicholas II in the summer 1895. This is generally understood as the beginning of "Yellow Peril" sentiment that was expressed in Europe. "Yellow Peril" is the racist fear that an alliance of China and Japan would conquer and subjugate the Western world.

Up to that point, Japan had been struggling to revise unequal treaties with Western countries for many decades. Taking examples of treaties with the United States, in November 1894, Japan succeeded in abolishing American extraterritoriality in Japan by signing the US-Japan Treaty of Commerce and Navigation, which revised the US-Japan Treaty of Amity and Commerce of 1858 signed during the Edo (Tokugawa) Period. Furthermore, Japan finally obtained the right to set her own tariffs in February 1911 by revising the US-Japan Treaty of Amity and Commerce of 1858.

In March 1906, the first of numerous anti-Japanese immigrant resolutions was passed in Californian State Legislature. Furthermore, the Californian Legislature passed the Webb-Haney Act in April 1913, which restricted land ownership by Japanese immigrants, and the Inman-McClatchy Bill which restricts land holding even by children with the American nationality of Japanese immigrants in November 1920.

Moreover, the US Congress passed the Jonson-Reed Act in November 1924 which virtually singled out Japanese immigrants. A very wide range of people of Japan boiled with rage over the series of racist laws that targeted specifically Japan. Even very pro-American Japanese intellectuals, such as NITOBÉ Inazo, UCHIMURA Kanzo and ASHIDA Hitoshi, greatly resented the passage of the Johnson-Reed Act of

1924. They stated that they would never visit the United States again since this Act was an inexcusable form of racism clearly targeted against a specific nation.

It should be noted that before World War I (1914-1918), the Western Powers dominated 84% of the globe with their vast colonies, compared to 35% around the year 1800. The 19<sup>th</sup> century was a period of extremely rapid expansion of the Western colonies all over the world.

Against these backgrounds, on February 13, 1919, the Japanese government first made a proposal for racial equality within the committee responsible for drafting the Covenant of the League of Nations at the Paris Peace Conference in Versailles, to the effect that elimination of racial discrimination should be clearly stated in the Article 21 (Religion) of the Covenant. However, Japan's proposal was not accepted, facing the fierce opposition from Australia, US and UK in particular.

On April 11, 1919 at the last meeting of the committee for drafting the Covenant of the League of Nations at the Paris Peace Conference, Japanese government made a second proposal, to the effect that elimination of racial discrimination should be clearly stated in the preface of Covenant. Japan's proposal was supported by an overwhelmingly majority (11 to 5) of committee members. Members from France, Italy, Portugal, Greece, Czechoslovakia, China and others supported Japan's proposal, while US, UK, Brazil, Poland and Rumania opposed it. However, US President Woodrow Wilson, chairman of the committee, intervened and overruled the majority decision. He argued that such an issue of importance should be decided unanimously. Although the Japanese Representative MAKINO Nobuaki and the French Representative Ferdinand Larnaude raised objections, Wilson dismissed them.

The background behind Japan's proposal of racial equality in this period was presumably the reflection of "Taisho Democracy" in Japan. The sentiment of the Japanese democracy was enhanced in Taisho Period (1912-1926) which came immediately after Meiji Period. Universal manhood suffrage was implemented in Japan in 1925, only seven years later from that in the UK in 1918.

These sentiments of discrimination against the Japanese people eventually led to the US-Japan War (1941-1945). Soon after the outbreak of the Second World War in December 1941, the Japanese Prime Minister made clear in his speech at the

Diet in January 1942 that Japan's war aim was to liberate all the oppressed nations of the world from the fetters of Anglo-Saxon colonialism. Japan's other war aim was to fight against communism. On November 25, 1936, Japan and Germany agreed the German-Japanese Anti-Comintern Pact, which aimed to counter the Soviet Union and the Third International and to fight against the Comintern.

However, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) decided to side with Stalin, the absolute dictator of totalitarian state of USSR, despite knowing that Stalin purged millions of his own people through three Moscow Trials 1936-1938. FDR's decision before the World War II, need to be remembered as the most enormous mistake in history of the world.

During the war, Japan convened the Greater East Asia Conference with six other East Asian countries in Tokyo, November 1943, and announced the Joint Declaration of the Greater East Asia Conference on November 6, 1943, stating the abolition of racial discrimination. This was entirely different from FDR's and Winston Churchill's so-called Atlantic Charter of August 14, 1941, which did not contain anything at all concerning racial equality and abolition of colonies. This meeting was held on the UK battleship *Prince of Wales* in the Atlantic Ocean. In addition, the Joint Declaration of the Greater East Asia Conference was obviously much superior to the Atlantic Charter in terms of human rights and democracy. Furthermore, the Greater East Asia Conference was the first ever summit limited to non-whites, which included seven heads of Asian states: Japan, Republic of China, the Empire of Manchuria, the Philippines, Burma, the Kingdom of Thailand and the Provisional Government of Free India.

It is very natural for Japan to be a pioneer of the racial equality movement worldwide because Japan had been the biggest victim in this sense for a very long period of time. Japan is most qualified to be a pioneer and a leader of the movement against racial discrimination. Racial discrimination was obviously one of the major reasons behind the Second World War.

### **The Most Important Lesson from the Second World War**

In world history, racial discrimination brought terrible disasters on humanity, not only with the Second World War but also other struggles or conflicts, including US

Civil Rights Movement and anti-Apartheid struggle in South Africa. This is one of the most important lessons for the future to understand.

Major political reasons behind the Second World War include the emergence and spread of communism as well as racism committed by Western countries. Economically, the major reason behind World War II was the Great Depression in 1930s, originating with the Wall Street Crash in October 1929 in the US, and the formation of Western bloc economies all over the world as a response to the Great Depression. If we look back on history, we can easily recognize that almost all of the major reasons behind World War II were rooted in Western countries.

### **Japan's Racial Equality Movement and Its Impacts on World History**

After the Second World War, Japan's accumulated efforts in this field bore many fruits in numerous developing countries, not only in Asia but in the other parts of the world, even although Japan had been defeated. Many countries were liberated from Western colonies, and finally attained their independence and self-determination.

Taking examples in Asia, Laos in July 1947, India and Pakistan including East Pakistan (the current Bangladesh) in August 1947, Burma in January 1948, Ceylon in February in 1948, Indonesia in August 1950, Cambodia in November 1953, Vietnam in July 1954, and Malaysia in August 1957 achieved their independence. After World War II, the UK, France and Holland returned to Asia to try to re-capture their colonies in fact. However, they failed because peoples in Asian countries were engulfed in the spirit of independence, tremendously encouraged and influenced by Japan's actions during the war. Western countries showed their intention, not to abolish their colonies, which was consistent with the American-British Atlantic Charter in August 1941, but completely inconsistent with the Joint Declaration of the Greater East Asia Conference led by Japan in November 1943.

We are very proud of Japan's tremendous contribution to the international community in fighting racism. Is there any single country that accomplished these great results, of influencing national independence, self-determination, and standing up for human rights, in all of human history?

Following the independence of many countries after World War II, the US

Civil Rights Act was enacted on July 2, 1964, and Apartheid in South Africa was completely abolished in April 1994. Thus, important progress made in the field of racial equality. In general, racial equality movements in Western countries are fairly lagged behind those of Japan.

Just 50 years after Japan's proposal for racial equality at the Paris Peace Conference, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) finally came into being in 1969 after the adoption by the UN General Assembly in New York in 1965. With the passage of time, we are very pleased to have the 96<sup>th</sup> Session of the CERD at the United Nations in Geneva in August 2018. We believe that Japan will continue to enthusiastically contribute as a leader and as a pioneer of the movement for racial equality.

### **Conclusion**

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) of the United Nations and the government of Japan are kindly requested to well disseminate the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Japan's Proposal of Elimination of Racial Discrimination toward February 2019, because Japan is really a pioneer in this field of the international community. This may help to resume momentum for international movements of racial equality.