

## **90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration of the National Levelers Association**

On March 3, the Buraku Liberation League (BLL) celebrated the 90th anniversary of its predecessor, the National Levelers Association, which was founded in Kyoto on March 3, 1922, 90 years ago. To celebrate, the BLL convened a national gathering with its constituencies as well as many guests from different sectors, including politicians and people from the business sector, religious organizations, labor unions, minority communities, human rights organizations, and the media.

The convention with 1,800 participants started with everyone singing “Lullaby of Takeda,” a song once sung by Buraku girl children while working as babysitters. Then, as BLL members sang the “liberation song,” people bearing BLL flags with the crown of thorns symbol marched into the venue. This was followed by a silent tribute by all to liberation fighters who have since passed away, and to those killed during the Great East Japan Earthquake last year. Kazuhisa Nakanishi, an actor, recited the Levelers Declaration, which was first declared on that same day 90 years ago at that same place, Kyoto Okazaki Public Hall.

BLL President Kumisaka called on all members, stating, “Today, we stand on the blood and sweat shed by all our predecessors who fought against discrimination and for liberation. Let us continue our struggle for the liberation of Buraku and all human beings.”

The gathering received congratulatory messages from guests representing various minority communities, including the Ainu, the Dalits, the challenged and Zainichi Koreans (Korean residents in Japan). Abe Yupo, representing the Ainu indigenous community, stressed the importance of education especially for school children. Most elementary and junior high school textbooks do not have proper or sufficient descriptions about the Ainu. Sushant Godghate, representing Ambedkar International Mission-Japan, focused on the connection between Jichiro Matsumoto, the great predecessor of Buraku liberation movement before and after the war, and B.A. Ambedkar, the father of India’s Dalit liberation movement. Both lived in the same generation and dedicated their lives to the liberation of the oppressed communities they were from. Toshio Kusunoki, representing DPI Japan, shared his thoughts about the Levelers Declaration, saying he was very shocked when he read it for the first time, as it encourages Burakumin to be proud of being Buraku and to stand up with anger and warmth as human beings. Finally, Shin Sugo, representing Koryosha, shared how she liked the Declaration, which has really given her strength. She pointed out that when people face difficulties such as emergent or critical situations brought by disaster, people release their hidden discriminatory consciousness or hatred against oppressed people, such as Zainichi Korean and Burakumin. She expressed her wish to continue her struggle together with the oppressed people.