

IMADR's Eighth General Assembly held in Tokyo

Following the two-day board of directors meeting on September 11 and 12, 2011, IMADR's quarterly General Assembly (GA) was held on the 13th in Tokyo with two hundred participants attending, mainly from Japan. It was approved by the GA that for the year beginning October 2011 to September 2012, IMADR will keep its focus on these key issues: 1) elimination of discrimination based on work and descent, 2) elimination of exploitative migration and trafficking in women and children, 3) upholding the rights of indigenous peoples, 4) upholding the rights of minorities including internally-displaced persons and Roma, 5) strengthening international human rights mechanisms and promoting their utilization by minority communities, and 6) crosscutting issues that include the elimination of racism and multiple forms of discrimination, and the human right to peace.

Chaired by IMADR vice-president Kinhide Mushakoji, the GA welcomed brief presentations by its officers from different parts of the world. To begin with, IMADR and IMADR Asia Committee (AC) president Nimalka Fernando made a brief report about activities of the AC, which is based in Sri Lanka. With the cessation of the civil war in the country in 2009, some hundred thousand people in the conflict area were driven away from their homes to become so-called "internally displaced persons." Among them, women and children are in the most vulnerable position, facing multiple forms of discrimination. AC focuses on the empowerment and training of these women to be human rights defenders. Also, the AC is much involved in the serious problem of exploitation and human rights violations imposed on many Sri Lankan migrant women working abroad. Among others, there is an immediate concern about a young woman who has been sentenced to death as a result of an unfair trial in Saudi Arabia, against which voices from the international community are necessary.

Durga Sob, president of FEDO (Feminist Dalit Organization in Nepal) and IMADR director, talked about the situation of Dalit women in Nepal who face multiple forms of discrimination based on caste and gender. Because of this, Dalit women are subject to many forms of violence, bad health and sanitary conditions, and untouchability. Poverty is also one of the most serious problems for them. Their literacy rate is very low, and so is their life expectancy. The government is required to address the difficult situations of Dalit women by fully implementing its policies and programs designed for the vulnerable community. While it is welcomed that the drafting of a new constitution is underway at the Constitutional Assembly, the Assembly is not correctly represented by the minority community, i.e. the number of members from the Dalit community is lower than it should be. A lot of challenges are going on in Nepal, and Sob called for more attention to and support for the real cause of Dalit women.

Bisi Olateru-Olagbegi, president of Women's Consortium of Nigeria (WOCOM) and IMADR director, briefly talked about the issue of trafficking in women and children that WOCOM has mainly worked on. While trafficking is global phenomena, it is a daily occurrence in Nigeria. Millions of children from rural areas are transported to urban areas to work as domestic helpers, shop attendees, factory workers, prostitutes or beggars. Thousands of women and girls from Nigeria are sent to Italy, UK and Belgium to work as prostitutes. It is said that about 60% of African women working as prostitutes in Europe are from Nigeria. While in Europe, women are

treated very badly. Root-causes of these problems rest with gender discrimination, poverty, globalization, racism and very strict laws in Europe. Impacts are enormous. WOCOM does a lot of advocacy work at the international level. Awareness-raising for people in the country is also one of important works of the organization. Because of ignorance, people are easily trapped, not knowing what their real situation is. Olateru-Olagbegi asked IMADR to support their work in awareness-building among the Nigerian people.

Herbert Heuss from the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma also made a brief presentation. This organization has worked with IMADR for 30 years. While the problem of exclusion and discrimination against Roma has been a long-term issue, it is getting worse in recent years in Europe along with the emergence of extreme rightists. For instance, in Slovakia and Czech, they typically throw fire bottles into places where Roma live, and shoot residents when they come out of the entrance to run away. The ideology of the extremists is deeply rooted into society. Even in France, the President takes advantage of the widespread propaganda of the extremists to drive Roma away from the country. Roma in Europe have diverse backgrounds. They are not one. For the past 20 years, unemployment has been rampant among Roma in Europe, with the unemployment rate as high as 90%. Their living conditions have remained the same as those of 50 years ago. In Hungary, a rightist group demonstrated in the village of Gygyospata and surrounded the Roma residential area. Together with IMADR, the organization sent a fact-finding mission to the village this year. The problem is very serious. Recently, the EU has requested each member state to develop national strategies to address the issue relating to Roma. We need to carefully follow up this process. Despite the existence of many policy papers and plans of action prepared by regional or national machineries in Europe, hardly any have been implemented. Decisive political will is needed.

The GA was concluded with the unanimous approval of all agendas presented by the board.