

## **“Learning is Empowerment”**

### **Marking the Closing Year of the UN Literacy Decade**

On September 9, 2012, about 430 people gathered to mark the last year of the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) in Osaka at an event entitled “From Kansai to the World! Learning is Empowerment.” Participating were people studying literacy at evening junior high school classes and community literacy classes in the Osaka area.

The UN Literacy Decade will come to an end at the end of 2012 and has aimed to reduce the world’s illiterate population and realize gender equality in access to education. In Japan, many people need a place to learn how to read and write, and many have been left behind due to lack of access to such education. The September 9 gathering was organized with a desire for the UNLD to be extended for another decade, and not come to an end this year.

During the gathering, it was confirmed that literacy activities are not only a process of learning how to read and write, but also of liberating oneself as a human being, and regaining the opportunity to learn, which discriminated Buraku people have been deprived of.

Presently, evening schools and literacy classes are attended by many elderly Korean people as well as migrant workers who have recently arrived and settled in Japan. There are 35 evening high schools in the entire country, 11 of which are located in Osaka Prefecture. Besides this, there are about 200 literacy/Japanese language classes in Osaka. Altogether, 6,000 people learn Japanese in Osaka. It was acknowledged during the gathering that evening schools should be further improved so that students do not just learn how to read and write but also g. It was also stressed that efforts be made towards the government making a law to utilize literacy/Japanese centers and develop Japanese education.

In the last half of the gathering, learners at evening high schools and literacy classes spoke about their experiences. Ms. Mizuho Yoshida from Nara said, “Illiteracy blocked me going forward in whatever job I took. Learning is fun. I urge the government not to close evening high schools.” Ms. Nobuko Higashida from Hinode literacy class also talked about her experiences. She was involved in the Buraku liberation movement and participated in literacy activities. She discovered herself by looking back on her

childhood and writing an essay about her life. She now realizes how much her parents had cared about her. “Literacy is not just something for us in Buraku areas, but for everyone in the world who cannot read and write. Literacy classes are necessary for all.”

Messages contributed to the organizer of the gathering, as well as messages from the participants, will be compiled and delivered to UNESCO in Paris in this autumn.