

CERD Recommendations and Challenges for Japan

In February 2010, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) reviewed the periodic report of the Japanese government during its 76th session, after which it completed its Concluding Observations, containing about 30 paragraphs of recommendations, which were submitted to the government in March 2010.

Japanese civil society has long been involved in the CERD review process, including holding consultations with the government prior to the latter's submission of the periodic reports, providing information to CERD from its own sources, and sending a delegation to the 76th CERD session to lobby and observe.

On January 19, 2011, ERD-Net, the networking group among local NGOs working for the elimination of different forms of racial discrimination in Japan that organized all preparations for civil society involvement, met with the relevant government offices for negotiations. Prior to this, ERD-Net, for which IMADR plays the role of coordinating and liaising, submitted a list of questions asking the government how it would respond to all the recommendations made by CERD last March. Almost all the recommendations concern long-standing problems and issues pertinent to racism and racial discrimination in Japan.

Among others, it is very important for Japan to enact a law that clearly and strictly prohibits racial discrimination, since there has been no single provision that punishes such acts and behavior. In the same context, the establishment of a national human rights institution that is independent from any authorities and appropriately structured to answer to all human rights requirements arising in the country is very much desired. In the Asia-Pacific region and in the world, Japan is one of a few states without such an institute. CERD clearly points out these important challenges to be duly met by Japan.

The negotiation on January 19 was participated in by five different ministries, including the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Justice, Education and Science, and Welfare and Labor, and the Cabinet Secretary Office and Cabinet Office. Fifteen NGO representatives participated and asked many questions, including regarding the critical issues mentioned above. The session was also attended by several Diet members from the ruling party, as well the opposition party, who also raised several questions.

The negotiation lasted four hours, leaving us many challenges ahead. A one-time negotiation is far from satisfying and feeling achievement. We all find that it is our task to continue dialogue and negotiations with the government while involving the legislation.