

violence against women

(Publicity)

U.N. pact helps shed light on women's rights issues

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on Dec. 18, 1979. In addition, it has been 10 years since the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, which falls on Nov. 25, was designated in 1999.

In honor of this occasion, The Japan Times sat down with Kazuko Ito, a lawyer and secretary general of Human Rights Now, an international human rights nongovernment organization based in Japan, to talk about progress on and issues surrounding women's rights. The following remarks are excerpts from the interview:

Human Rights Now especially focuses on life-threatening issues and violence against women is one of our focused domains. With special focus on Asia, we conduct research, advocacy and lobbying activities in cooperation with local NGOs.

Asia has serious women's rights issues involving violence. For example in India, where we have conducted focused research this year, some



Kazuko Ito

women are burned to death when they cannot pay adequate dowry their husbands require. If not death, some are forced into commercial prostitution by their husbands and suffer physical violence if they refuse. Seven thousand to 8,000 women per year — on the basis of statistics only — are killed, commit suicide or die suspiciously.

We consider violence seen in cases like this as the most severe form of discrimination against women. Violence also lurks behind many issues concerning women's social advancement, as it has a "chilling effect" that hinders women.

When the convention was

adopted 30 years ago, however, these problems were overlooked as the convention was focusing more on issues like sexual equality in politics, employment, education, etc., at the initiative of Western women. I think one of the most remarkable achievements of the convention in these 30 years is that light has been shed on violence as an underlying problem that need to be solved to combat discrimination against women. Amid increasing recognition in the 1990s, a U.N. Special Rapporteur on violence against women was appointed in 1994. In 1995, the World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, dealt largely with violence,

with participants from the so-called Southern Countries, and established specific goals toward it.

More recently, initiative for the U.N. Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is helping make the problems clearer. It targets reduction of maternal mortality ratio among other things, such as ending poverty and hunger, reducing child mortality, etc. But reduction of maternal mortality, compared to other targets, has not seen good progress. One reason for this is that women under gender discrimination do not have access to medical care. With statistics making the delay in maternal mortality reduction

visible, people have started to give more notice to this problem.

To improve the situation in Asia, Japan holds a unique and advantageous position, as an Asian country that is neither Western nor developing. As a Japan-based international NGO, we feel this through our activities. For example, when HRN and other NGOs wrote letters of complaint to the Indian government, only we got a response from the government. It is meaningful that not only local, domestic NGO but NGOs outside of the target country raise question and point out problems to make governments act. And when doing so,

Japan-based NGOs could have a larger impact than Western NGOs, as it is often the case that Asian countries are unwilling to listen to proposal from the West, saying they are just different.

In that sense, I think Japan's progress in domestic women's rights issues is also important to be a leading case in Asia. Japan had its report reviewed in July by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and it was pointed out that there were many issues to improve, including the ratification of the optional protocol of the convention, which recognizes the competence of the committee to



Safe home: These women and children escaped domestic violence by staying at a local NGO-run shelter supported with government aid in Rajasthan, India. HUMAN RIGHTS NOW

consider complaints from individuals. Under the new government's initiative, ratification of the optional protocol is becoming a realistic expectation. I hope that the protocol, which

has been ratified by only a small number of countries in Asia so far, will be ratified by Japan before long and that by doing so will spur other Asian countries to follow suit.

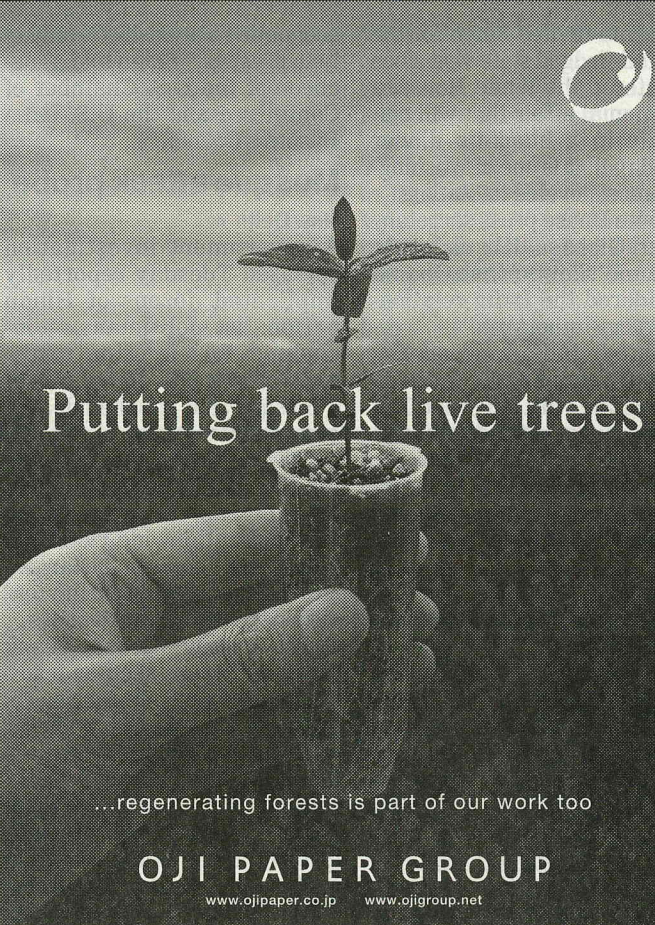
Human Rights Now symposium

Human Rights Now will hold a symposium called Japan's Human Rights Reform in Global Attention — Challenge of the New Government and Civil Society on Dec. 11, in time with Human Rights Day on Dec. 10.

The symposium, to be held from 6:30 p.m. at Aoyama Gakuin University in Tokyo, will include presentations and a panel discussion by human rights lawyers, including Makoto Teranaka, secretary general of Amnesty International Japan, focusing on CEDAW and its optional protocol ratification issue.

For more details, visit the Human Rights Now Web site at <http://hrn.or.jp>. For information regarding donations, e-mail to info@ngo-hrn.org. Human Rights Now accepts donations through postal or bank transfer.

Human Rights Now: Marukou-Building 3F, 1-20-6, Higashi-Ueno, Taito-ku, Tokyo; Tel: (03) 3835-2110.



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12/5(土) 佐藤 幹夫 が語る

司会=掛尾良夫(キネマ旬報映画総合研究所)

「坂の上の雲」と旅順の風景

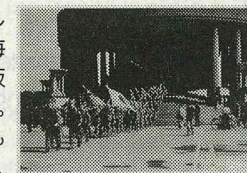
NHK大河ドラマ「太平記」「秀吉」の演出家として知られる佐藤幹夫氏が、2009年11月から、毎年、3年にわたって放送される超大作ドラマ「坂の上の雲」の脚本、演出を手掛けることになった。この作品は、あの司馬遼太郎の同名の原作をもとにしたもので、秋山兄弟を阿部寛、本木雅弘、正岡子規を香川照之が演じている。閉塞感に包まれる現在、近代国家を建設しようとする100余年前の若者たちを通して、佐藤幹夫は何を描こうとしたのか。そして、日露戦争の重要なポイントとなった旅順・203高地は、現在の日本、中国の交流の場となっている。「坂の上の雲」とは、封建の世から目覚めたばかりの日本が、そこを登れば、やがては手が届くと思いがれた欧米的近代「国家」というものを「坂の上にたなびく一筋の雲」に譬えた切なさや憧憬をこめた題名である。

この講座では、日本の近代化に奔走した青春群像の魅力、現代の日本人にとっての「坂の上の雲」はあるのか、そして明治と現在の旅順について語る。



◎ゲストスピーカー
佐藤 幹夫 (NHKディレクター)

昭和20年7月5日東京生まれ。東京大学文学部卒。主な作品に、芸術作品賞「破獄」「海の群像」、芸術選奨新人賞「約束の旅」、放送文化基金賞「私の愛したウルトラセブン」、モンテカルロテレビ祭グランプリ「舞いぐれ」、大河ドラマ「太平記」「秀吉」、スペシャルドラマ「聖徳太子」ほかドキュメンタリーも含め多数。



日本軍大連港にて



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