

## For protecting children's lives and health from Covid-19, and for ensuring their healthy growth and development

As the Japanese government was taking reactive approaches to the spread of Covid-19, the novel virus spread among children and school staff across the country. Thus, it became difficult for children to learn at school with safety. Facing this situation, Zenkyo (All Japan Teachers and Staffs Union) made an urgent request to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, calling for conducting widespread PCR tests for children and school personnel, the cancellation of nationwide surveys on academic ability, the improvement of learning conditions for small classes, and taking appropriate responses for female students who have economic difficulty purchasing sanitary products.

The Japanese government postponed the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games for a year. In the summer of 2021, they forcibly held the international events in the middle of the spread of infection, without listening to strong voices from home and abroad calling for the cancellation or another postponement of the Games. In spite of the organizers' official decision of holding the events with no spectators, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government still stuck to its plan to take elementary and junior high school students to Olympic venues in Tokyo, causing massive protests from parents and school staff. In the heat wave and under the declaration of a state of emergency, various actions were carried out around the nation calling for an immediate halt to the Summer Games, for the authorities' full commitment to infection control, and for the cancellation of the plan to take schoolchildren to Olympic venues.

Zenkyo published a statement of the secretary-



general and sent a written request for the cancellation of the plan to take children to Olympic venues to the Tokyo Organizing Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games. In addition, the union made representations four times to the Education Ministry, claiming that the authorities urge the Organizing Committee to cancel children's mobilization plan and respect individual schools' decision as to whether to take children there. On July 2, 2021, along with its affiliated organizations in the prefectures hosting the Games and the National Federation of Private School Teachers and Staff Unions (Shikyoren), Zenkyo issued a joint appeal for the abandonment of the program to take children to Olympic venues as well as for the protection of students' lives and health.

In many prefectures and municipalities across the country, teachers' unions and civil groups jointly staged demonstrations and a petition drive against the mobilization program, which led to a wave of representations to local authorities and school boards. With the public opposition increasing, almost all the authorities were forced to cancel the mobilizing scheme.

## Teachers' collective voice leads to scrapping periodic renewal system of teaching license



Press release of submitting signatures to the Education ministry, July 2021.

In 2009, the government introduced a periodic renewal program of teaching license, putting a ten-year term limit to the license and requiring all professional teachers to take a 30-hour “renewal course” every ten years after obtaining the qualification. The renewal course was usually offered during summer vacation and often overlapped with another mandatory training course for teachers with 10 years’ experience. Along with other duties to be done during summer holidays, these courses laid a heavy burden on teachers.

In such a situation, not only teachers’ unions but also principals’ associations and school boards voiced opposition toward the program. In March 2020, the Education Ministry asked the Central Council for Education for advice regarding a review of the

teaching license renewal program.

Meanwhile, Zenkyo launched a signature campaign called “My opinion,” pushing for the abolition of the renewal program. This petition



was welcomed at schools throughout the country, collecting 37,387 signatures in a short period of time, including ones by non-unionized teachers and managerial staff members. Zenkyo published many employees’ serious voices at a press conference and presented the petition to the ministry.

In November 2021, the Central Council for Education announced that they would reorganize the renewal program into a new-type one, and the existing system is set to come to an end in July 2022 after legal revisions at the parliament. This is one of the significant results achieved by continuing efforts by teaching staff members all over the country.

## Great success – “Education Forum 2021” held full online

“Education Forum 2021” took place full online from August 19 to 22.

In the opening plenary session on the first day, Juichi Yamagiwa, Director-General of the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature, gave a lecture under the title of “What is the

original intention of education?” and a special program entitled “Ten years since the March 11 Disaster” was aired online as well. In addition to individual viewers, a lot of people gathered at a total of 31 satellite venues around the nation to watch the event.

In the lecture, Yamagiwa called for people to stop to consider the role of education from scratch, as the entire society as well as the educational world is being overwhelmed by a wave of Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

In 4 thematic forums on the second day, participants discussed various issues: their practice to support children under the pandemic; how to address the trend toward ICT; improvement of educational conditions; and gender equality. On the third and fourth days, 30 workshops were held based on 224 reports presented by participating organizations.

The four-day online meeting achieved great

success, attended by a total of 4,000 people, including parents, citizens, teachers, and high school and college students.



31 Satellite venues all over the country were connected online behind the opening plenary session.

## Establishment standards for special needs schools set by over 10 years' movement

The standards for establishment of special needs schools were introduced on September 24, 2021. Standards for establishment of schools are minimum criteria for school installers to comply with, which are ordinances the education minister enacts in accordance with Article 3 of the School Education Act. Although the standards had been set for kindergartens, colleges, primary, junior high and high schools, special needs schools had no such criteria. As the number of disabled children going to school has increased since the 1980s, many schools have come to suffer from a shortage of classrooms. Most of them have coped with the shortage by turning music rooms, science labs, or workrooms into ordinary classrooms. Even now, a lot of children are forced to learn in a single classroom partitioned with a curtain.



The flyer of demanding the practical standards for establishment of special needs school

Calling for the establishment standards for special needs schools, parents, citizens, and school staff have worked together for more than a decade and presented to the parliament a petition with over 630,000 signatures. These steady and tenacious efforts have led to setting the standards. However, the newly-set criteria for special schools have some problems: no upper limit

to the enrollment of students; only one teacher deployed in a special classroom; no ceiling on commuting time; and existing schools are given grace to comply with the

standards. Zenkyo continues to promote the movement for improving the criteria and for setting up a necessary and sufficient number of special schools.

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## Pursuing certain path to eliminate teachers' long working hours

The elimination of long working hours is the most significant and pressing challenge for teachers in Japan.

The Education Ministry intends to implement a variable working hour system on an annual basis, which extends working hours in the busiest time while adding days off during an extended leave. However, this system is no use to solving the problem, just covering up the reality of teachers' overtime work. Zenkyo and its affiliated local organizations are against local authorities attempting to enact an ordinance to introduce the variable working hour system. As of the end of 2021, a quarter of all the local

governments enacted such an ordinance and few of them introduced the system to schools.

Zenkyo pushes for drastic measures to eliminate long working hours, as well as a large increase in school personnel and a fundamental shift from the neoliberal education policy. In January 2022, the union held a symposium on the theme of

“Pursuing certain path to eliminate long working hours.” A total of 180 people, including faculty members and lawyers, took part in the event and had discussions based on a statement made by a wife who had lost her husband due to death from overwork.

Zenkyo plans to conduct a survey of the current working conditions of 4,000 school personnel in October 2022, determined to step up its campaign to gain public understanding for the argument that solving teachers' prolonged work problem is essential for providing a decent education.

▶ Symposium on pursuing certain path to eliminate long working hours, January 2022



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## Protesting against Russia's invasion of Ukraine, calling for protection of Japan's pacifist Constitution

In October 2021, Fumio Kishida replaced Yoshihide Suga as prime minister. In the general election later in the same month, the forces advocating the revision of Japan's pacifist Constitution – the ruling Liberal

Democratic Party, the Komei Party (the LDP's junior coalition partner), and Nippon Ishin no Kai (the right-wing opposition) – commanded more than two-thirds of all seats in the Lower House. Prime Minister Kishida

clearly stated his intent to amend the Constitution during his tenure, giving momentum to the pro-revision forces.

Going against this trend, many organizations, and individuals, including Zenkyo, are committed to a nationwide petition drive to block the constitutional amendment, claiming that it is important to apply the Constitution to our lives, not to change itself.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations and absolutely unacceptable. The war, the most serious violation of human rights, should be ended immediately. At the end of February, Zenkyo issued a statement protesting against the Russian government. In a demonstration staged in front of Yotsuya Station in central

Tokyo, Zenkyo called on the Japanese government to make every diplomatic effort to build peace, both as the nation having the war-renouncing Article 9 of the Constitution and as the only atomic-bombed country that embraces the three non-nuclear principles; not producing, not possessing, and not allowing nuclear weapons to enter the country.



## Let us increase union members through broad dialogues – overcoming Covid-19 crisis

As the unionization rate of Japan is on a declining trend, Zenkyo set out a new three-year plan for unionization in 2019, continuing efforts to increase union membership by encouraging dialogues with unorganized workers. Since being hit by the coronavirus pandemic in the spring of 2020, union activities have been facing difficulties due to the restriction of gathering. Nevertheless, by racking their brains, Zenkyo members have made creative efforts to continue activities under the pandemic. The use of online media, for example, made it easier to communicate with those who have to care for their children or parents and live in remote areas such as isolated islands. Many teachers suffer from a

lot of stress and anxiety, pressed by additional duties like responding to the infection and giving classes online. Teachers' unions are now expected to exert further efforts to strengthen the bonds between workers and increase membership, by holding small gatherings and talks with newly-recruited or part-time teachers and staff.



The flyer of introducing Zenkyo and calling to new teachers to be a member of us, 2022