

Zenkyo Holds International Symposium with 3 Overseas Delegates

Zenkyo and the Research Institute of Democracy and Education (RIDE) held the “International Symposium for the Struggle against the Attack on Teachers’ Professionalism and Stronger Control over Teachers” on February 19 in Tokyo. As panelists from other countries, Claudio Franqui, who is in charge of international affairs of Federazione lavoratori della conoscenza - Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (FLC-CGIL), Manuela Mendonça, candidate for secretary general of Federação Nacional dos Professores (FENPROF), and Barbara Madeloni, president of Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA), joined the symposium. Franqui revealed how the Italian government for the last 10 years has slashed education budgets, frozen wages, strengthened authority of heads of institutions, misused evaluation against teachers, and forced teachers to work longer hours. Mendonça spoke about Portuguese resistance and struggle during “four years of austerity” from 2011 to 2015 as well as “strong union action” under the left-wing government



Four panelists reported on the educational circumstances of each country and the struggle of labor unions by teachers.

established in 2016 to “put a stop to a program of minimum State for the poor and maximum State to the rich”.

Madeloni reported that she was elected president of the MTA with her platform to “increase rank and file activism and leadership, to expand union democracy, and to becoming a fighting union” and that they won in a referendum regarding charter schools.

Speaking on behalf of Zenkyo, General Secretary Masako Obata stated that heavy workloads and long working hours are rampant among teachers under national education policies promoting excessive competition and failing to address the shortage of teachers. She also reported on how the government tries to build a system to control teachers to force them to keep their mouth shut and follow its policies.

Following floor discussions, coordinator Masaaki Katsuno (RIDE representative and Tokyo University professor) stressed the importance of teachers’ professionalism in order to achieve “high-quality education,” “fair education,” and “education for social justice”. He concluded the discussions by encouraging teachers to continue their efforts to have dialogues and build empathy with parents, citizens, and students.



International Symposium for the Struggle against the Attack on Teacher's Professionalism and Stronger Control over Teachers.

Block Revision of Article 9 to Protect Peace for Children

As a result of the House of Representatives election in October, pro-constitutional revision forces now have three-fourths of parliamentary seats.

In the current session of the Diet, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe stated, "The existence of the Self-Defense Forces should be clearly defined in the Constitution." This is far from the will of citizens. In an opinion poll released by Kyodo News on January 13, 2018, 54.8% are opposed to constitutional revision under Prime Minister Abe, and 52.7% are against including a reference to the SDF in Article 9 of the Constitution.

Based on a principle of laws, "A later law repeals an earlier law," adding to Article 9 another clause related to the SDF will turn Clause 1 and 2 of the article into a dead letter and destroy the constitutional principle of peace. A revised Article 9 could allow the government to lift



Constitutional Struggle Exchange Meeting 2017

restrictions on many laws, such as the SDF law and the contingency law, and to revise them in order to enable the SDF to use force abroad. This will give impacts to national budgets, education policies, and all the other areas related to citizens' living conditions.

In order to block the Abe government from proposing constitutional amendments, a campaign to collect 30 million signatures are being conducted in offices and communities throughout the nation.

National signature campaign for better education

Zenkyo has been holding a nationwide education signature campaign calling for tuition-free education and small-sized class (35 or less) in elementary, junior high, and high schools. It has collected more than 450 million signatures for the last 29 years in this campaign.

Parents, teachers, community residents, and high school students are joining together every year to carry out a wide range of activities throughout Japan. They have submitted the signatures to local and national governments, paving the way for improving educational policies in local and national levels. The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has urged Japan to submit by May 2018 a periodic report on its progress of tuition-free education and subsidy programs for Ko-



rean school students. Zenkyo is making the utmost effort to push the national government to take responsibility to improve educational environment.

A union member of Saitama prefecture requested a signature in front of the station.

Participants from all over Japan have discussions in “Education Forum 2017”

About 5,000 parents, citizens, and teachers participated in the “Education Forum 2017” from August 18 to 20 in Okayama City. This annual gathering is organized by an organizing committee consisting of Zenkyo and many civic groups to discuss education related issues.

The latest forum was held amid increasing moves to revise the Constitution and to deny pacifism. Participants acknowledged the need to focus on children’s actual conditions and encourage parents, residents, and teachers to jointly create a school at a time when

the national government is trying to develop human resources that meet the need of the nation and business circles. In 8 thematic forums and 30 workshops,

reports were made revealing how children are forced into severe competition. On the other hand, participants were convinced that practices in post-



“Home Economics Education” Group Discussion war educational research efforts have been passed down to and encouraged younger generations.

Education Ministry strengthens “moral education” in schools

Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology revised its official curriculum guidelines for kindergartens and elementary and junior high schools in March 2017 and for high schools in March 2018. The guidelines set the standards for school education and textbooks. The most serious issue of the latest revision is that it is designed to force all schools to follow not only its study contents but also its teaching and evaluating methods

so that children can develop “talents and skills” determined by the government.

In the revised guidelines, dotoku (moral education) is strengthened to require schools to teach “virtue” set by the state. In elementary and junior high schools, dotoku will become part of “special subjects.” In high schools, a new subject called kokyo (public affairs) will be introduced.

The Education Ministry will require elementary schools to introduce

compulsory English lessons for third graders, who needs to develop their native language skills, raising criticism and concerns among teachers and parents throughout Japan.

Zenkyo is publishing study materials and holding workshops to share issues related to the revised guidelines. It strives to promote understandable and enjoyable school lessons for every child in all stage of development.

Zenkyo releases statement for reducing teachers’ heavy workloads and long working hours

On November 20, 2017, Zenkyo released a statement calling for drastic reduction of teachers’ long working hours. The statement sticks to a viewpoint of improving the quality of education as it recognizes the need to cut teachers’ excessive workloads and long working hours not just for solving their health problems but also for securing their time to engage with children.

Based on the Japanese Constitution guaranteeing all workers to have decent living conditions with 8 hours of work a day, the statement analyzes from various angles teachers’ actual working conditions and their causes. In order to achieve less workloads and shorter working hours for Japanese teachers, drastic increase in the number of teachers is essential, which is necessary for

reducing class size and hours of teaching, in addition to revision of the government’s education policies and labor laws. Aimed at building a national consensus based on the statement, Zenkyo is having talks with education-related organizations, such as national associations of school principals, the ILO office in Japan, and political parties.

For a World without Nuclear Weapons

The United Nations on July 7 adopted the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Zenkyo were actively taking part in rallies and publicity activities calling for the adoption of the Treaty. It sent Executive Committee member Nozomi Abe and two young members in Osaka to New York as part of a delegation organized by the Japan Council against A & H Bombs (Gensuikyo) on the occasion of the second round of negotiations on the Treaty at the U.N. They observed negotiation sessions and joined related activities, including "Women's March to Ban the Bombs!" hosted by the Women's International League

for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and other organizations.

The 2017 World Conference against A & H Bombs was held from August 3 in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, participated in by 95 overseas delegates from 22 countries and about 15,000 Japanese participants. During the Conference, Zenkyo, together with many teachers, organized "Teachers Forum for Peace". About 100 participants at the forum listened to Hibakusha's testimonies and exchanged with 11 overseas delegates, including members of Peace Action in the United States and teachers from the Middle East invited to the World Conference by the "Oleander Initiative" program.



"The 2017 World Conference against A & H Bombs" Closing ceremony

Zenkyo has collected more than 38,000 signatures in the International Signature Campaign in Support of the Appeal of the Hibakusha which was launched in 2016. It continues to actively take part in the signature campaign and other actions for a world without nuclear weapons.

7 Years After, Disaster-hit Areas Still Suffer Delay in Rebuilding Efforts

Although 7 years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake, the delay in reconstruction of disaster victims' livelihoods is still serious. Victims are exhausted physically and mentally due to their prolonged life as evacuees and unforeseeable future. About 73,000 people are still living in temporary homes in 1,054

municipalities in 47 prefectures.

On November 4 and 5, 2017, Zenkyo conducted a study tour to "see, walk, and think in disaster-hit areas" in Fukushima Prefecture with 30 members participating. In Iitate Village and Namie Town where the evacuation order was lifted in March last year, the whole towns were



A study tour to "see, walk, and think in disaster-hit areas" in Fukushima Prefecture

empty of people and completely quiet. Houses were dilapidated by wild animals, and fields were ruined too.

Zenkyo Sends Donations for Communities and Children in Quake-hit Nepal

An earthquake that hit Nepal in April 2015 took lives of more than 8,000 people and caused tremendous damage all over the country.

Zenkyo collected more than 1.5



A community center completed in Nepal's mountainous area

million yen in donations from its members and sent it to Nepal via the Japan Confederation of Trade Unions (Zenroren). The money was used to build a community center in Karutari Village located in Nepal's eastern mountainous area. From October 10 to 14, Zenkyo International Bureau Director Isao Hijikata visited the village to see the community center. He also had talks with officials of the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions and the Nepal National Teachers Association and learned about post-quake reconstruction works and

efforts to reform national policies.

It requires nearly 6 hours of driving on steep mountain roads to go from Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, to Karutari Village, where many residents are still living in temporary shelters. Labor unions in Nepal and other countries are providing supports to areas which are unable to receive relief from the government or overseas NGOs.

Hijikata learned that residents are using the community center to have meetings, to hold schools for mothers, and to vaccinate infants. He heard from residents about rebuilding efforts and their living conditions.