

STATEMENT :

We, the participants of the Asia Inter-religious Conference on Article 9 and Peace in Asia, call on the Japanese government to honor both the letter and the spirit of Article 9 of its constitution: to never act as an aggressor in war nor actively support any aggressor in any violent action or any action that may threaten the spirit of the preamble of the constitution, which says that all people of the world have the right to live free from fear and want. As religious people we believe that Article 9 honors the religious mandate of “You shall not kill” and promotes the nurture of all life. We call on Japan to honor its constitution to be a non-violent nation.

CONTEXT :

In this conference, we have become aware that 62 years after World War II, Japan is accelerating a process of radical change in its involvement in war. From being a country that collaborates and supports war, it is now pushing to become a country that can wage war through a revision of Article 9.

We were reminded that peace can never be achieved through military violence but only through promoting a culture open to patient dialogue and diversity that promotes justice, equality, and respect.

BACKGROUND

The current transition is intimately connected to the global realignment of the United States (U.S.) strategy. Japan’s cooperation in this objective consolidates the defense structure of what the Pentagon calls the Arc of Instability, which spans from Eastern Europe over the Middle East and India to East Asia. The realignment, which is the greatest since the Korean War, lies in the whole gamut of strengthened military cooperation ranging from Japan’s commitment to full participation in ballistic missile defense, search and destroy operations, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, counter-terrorism including fingerprinting of visitors to the U.S. and Japan. The realignment also ‘justifies’ Japan’s deployment of the Self Defense Forces outside Japan and the expansion of the U.S. military presence in Japan, use of her seaport and airport facilities, roads, water spaces, and control of airspaces and frequency bands.

Along with this move, the efforts to strengthen “patriotism” in recent years through laws such as those on the Hinomaru (national flag), Kimigayo (national

anthem), wire-tapping and emergency legislation were set in place. In addition to the Diet's passing of the amendment to the Fundamental Law on Education, which is patriotic-centric, the Japanese government has been in the process of changing the constitution and particularly targeting Article 9. The Diet on May 14, 2007, passed into law a controversial national referendum bill for constitutional revision. This law has paved the way for a change in the constitution, which has become a real political goal with parliamentary time set aside for it.

DECISIONS

In the light of these dangerous developments in Japan, we cannot be passive spectators. Based on our religious teaching, we believe that:

- War is always a crime
- War brings death both to the body of the victim and the soul of the perpetrator

COMMITMENT

We commit ourselves to:

- Sincerely practice the spirit of Article 9 at all times and in all places
- Protect the dignity of the victims of all forms of violence

RESPONSE

Religious communities from Asia and the world were called to Japan to hold an “Asia Inter-religious Conference on Article 9 and Peace in Asia.” In response, religious leaders from Korea, Okinawa, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, India, Sri Lanka, United States, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Germany, and Japan met to study and listen to keynote addresses and panel presentations, to discuss action plans, to pray and sing together in a peace concert and peace march. Appeals were made by participants from Burma and the Philippines to address the critical situations in their countries. The meeting was held at the Korean YMCA in Tokyo, Japan, November 29-December 1, 2007 and was attended by 220 people. The meeting expressed the need for ongoing gatherings of this kind.

ACTION

In order to promote the movement for Non-violence and Peace, and in line with our commitments we make the following appeals.

I We petition the Japanese Government to:

1. Revise its treaties and commitments and rectify future treaties in accordance with Article 9
2. Revise Japan's foreign policy away from U.S. influence towards a peace oriented diplomacy with special emphasis on North-East Asia
3. Stop the construction of the new base in Okinawa, reduce the number of bases, aiming for permanent closure
4. Withdraw troops deployed abroad
5. Repeal the National Referendum Bill
6. Acknowledge responsibility for aggression against the people of the Asia Pacific region and have the Diet make a formal apology
7. Abolish the "military" by transforming the Self Defense Forces into a civilian rescue and relief team
8. Rescind the immigration legislation requiring fingerprinting of foreigners entering Japan, which creates mistrust

II We call on religious circles and persons in Japan to:

1. Be in solidarity with citizens' peace movements, particularly by participation in the Global Article 9 Gathering to be held in Japan in May, 2008
2. Deepen our prayerful concern and commitment to peace-building, caring for all lives
3. Teach the next generation about the historical facts of aggression
4. Declare each religious institution a demilitarized zone
5. Encourage spiritual solidarity among religious leaders to promote life and peace
6. Create new peace education and discourse based on different religious traditions and actively engage in peace education

III We call on religious circles and persons of Asia and the world to:

1. Treasure Article 9 as a patrimony of the whole human race and establish a global Article 9 network

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2. Encourage a clause in favor of demilitarization and renunciation of war to be included in the constitution of every nation
3. To chart a new path for human history, using every opportunity to publicly call for abolishment of all war
4. Invite their community to pray and act for peace and non-violence and designate a special peace day in Asia
5. Stand up for their religion whenever it is being abused as a support for perpetrating violence and repent for any complicity
6. Share information about violations of human rights in the world, organize protest actions combined with prayer and promote democracy
7. Ask the Japanese government to keep Article 9 and make it a living reality
8. Establish an international people's peace panel to expose as unconstitutional or unethical, acts or policies of war making
9. Look for a way to encourage conscientious objection