

## **Christians' Steps Toward Making Peace**

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### **1. Introduction**

Hello, my name is Mikako Nishihara. From April 1998 to July 2006, I had worked as the Executive Secretary on the Committees on Peace and Nuclear issues and the Committee on Women of the National Christian Council in Japan. I am currently addressing the issue of peace as a Trustee and Director of the YWCA of Japan from a Christian standpoint.

Let me speak to you today as one of those who were setting up the Christian Network for Peace – Sticking to the Peace Constitution (hereinafter “Christian Network for Peace”) in 1999 and the Interfaith Network for Peace (hereinafter “the Interfaith Network”) in 2012.

I am not a pastor. I am a layperson of the Nippon Sei Ko Kai (the Anglican Church in Japan). I am not able to make a theological speech to you, but as a Christian, a woman, and a mother, as well as a staff of an international NGO whose work is based on Christian principles, I am sharing with you a story of Christian efforts for peace since 1990. I hope that you will find it useful to you for the consultations during the Global Interreligious Conference on Article 9, which will be started tomorrow.

### **2. Christians in Japan stepping toward making peace – from 1990 to the Present**

#### **(1) Japan on the eve of a new war**

Back in 1990, citizens in Japan began to take actions, saying, “Japan is on the eve of a new war”; the United Nations decided to dispatch the Multi National Forces following the Iraq invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990, and they began airstrikes on Iraq on January 17, 1991. In those days, the government of Japan was reacting to this as follows:

1991: Had the Bill on Cooperation for the UN Peacekeeping Operations passed.

1996: Held consultations on the Review of the Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation.

- 1997: Agreed on the new Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation.
- 1998: Submitted Bills related to the new Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation for debate at the Diet, including the Bill on a Situation in the Areas Surrounding Japan, the Amendment Bill for the Self-Defense Forces Act, and the Amendment Bill for the Japan-U.S. Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement.
- 1999: Had the Bills Related to the new Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation passed  
Had the Bill Regarding the National Anthem and Flag Passed.  
Had the Bill to set up Research Commissions on the Constitution passed.

By the way, under these circumstances, Japan's prime ministers were replaced six times within less than just ten years.

## **(2) People of faith connect citizens through dialogues**

In those days, citizens were gathering in front of the Diet day after day for sit-ins and rallies in protest of the situations with a sense of impending crisis. People of faith including Christians were no exception. In December 1998, the NCCJ kept sending letters by fax from its office in Nishi-Waseda in the name of its General Secretary to the headquarters of all traditional religions, stating, "Let's speak out to say no as people of faith to the move toward war. Why don't we have a prayer meeting among different religious sects and denominations?" Looking back, it may seem to have been a bold, impolite and abrupt action, but a Buddhist priest of the Nipponzan Myohoji Buddhist temple immediately responded to the fax and said, "Let's do it!".

In January 1999, the NCCJ called upon Buddhists to hold together an Interfaith Gathering for Peace at Toshima Public Hall in Tokyo. Based on that gathering, 800 people of faith surrounded the Diet building in March that year to say "no" to the path toward war. This triggered further major actions by people of faith. Ken-ichi Otsu, then-General Secretary of the NCCJ, and Rev. Takao Takeda of the Nipponzan Myohoji talked to each and every civic group and labor union sitting-in in front of the Diet and said, "Let's take actions together."

At that time, a numerous citizens and members of labor unions were sitting in day after day in front of the Diet building to protest the Japanese government's move leading up to war. Despite the fact that each of them had the same sense of impending crisis as they were sitting in for protest, there was an invisible, ideological barrier of division facing them. Officials of labor unions lined with the Communist Party and the former Socialist Party were mutually exclusive, and

citizens who were gathering on an individual basis were full of impatience with themselves being alone and unable to be strong enough to protest. But the circumstance was radically changed by the two persons of faith who were talking to them.

The barriers of separation between each of them were removed. That is exactly what every one of them was waiting for. It was such an epoch-making event in the history of people's movement in Japan.

### **(3) United in "Protecting Life"**

On May 21, 1999, the "May 21 National Big Rally to Stop the War Bills" turned out to be held at the Meiji Park in Tokyo. Motor coaches were arranged for participants from every corner of the country to join the rally. There were 50,000 people who came together there. The rally was organized by the People of Faith Executive Committee for the Rally to "Seek Peace" and 20 Labor Unions Related To Land, Marine, Air and Port Transportation Services. Among the chairpersons of the Rally were representatives from the Nipponzan Myohoji and the YWCA of Japan, and the NCCJ's then-General Secretary Otsu made his speech representing the organizers. The rally's declaration was read out by a representative from the Japan Christian Women's Organization, and the rally was hosted by myself as an executive secretary of the NCCJ.

It was greatly difficult to organize the big rally together among different groups with different standpoints and approaches for peace building, but we decided to build consensus based on unity in one thing: "protecting life". Workers of land, marine and air transportation services would be always subject to the risk of their lives if they were to engage in transportation leading up to war. Protecting the lives of those people is a mission for the labor unions. Uniformed pilots, flight attendants, and sailors stood at the forefront of the demonstration. Buddhists appealed that never again will they allow killings in war, while preaching the Buddha's teaching, "Do not kill." Christians, based on their reflective consciousness that they were unable to resist the war of aggression, said that all forms of life were created by God, and that they would pray and act for the restoration of respect for all of them that cannot be violated by anyone.

### **(4) The Christian Network for Peace established**

Following this big rally, the NCCJ approached Christian denominations and organizations to create a Christian network to seek peace for a further development of the movement. As a result, the Christian Network for Peace was established in October 1999. Then-General Secretary Otsu,

along with the NCCJ's Committee on the Peace and Nuclear Issues and the Committee on the Issue of Yasukuni Shrine, discussed the matter beyond the frameworks of different member churches and organizations of the NCCJ. The discussion was recorded as saying:

- How do we see the teaching of Jesus and the way he lived as he said, "Turn your swords into plowshares"?
- Are we confident in that "arms cannot make peace" in trying to prevent the attempt to make a nation of war?
- Or are we being carried away by the situation?
- The things are getting considerably worse. We would be swallowed by that unless we take actions with a clear determination.
- Let's demonstrate our will for renunciation of war and non-obedience.

The purposes of the establishment of the Christian Network for Peace included the following:

- Now, Japan has entered the eve of a new war. Various kinds of human rights are being threatened to cooperate for war.
- When Japan made aggressions with arms in the Asia-Pacific region, the churches were willing to cooperate on this. We, as believers in Jesus as Christ who declared the Gospel of peace, are determined that never again must Japan give military threats to its neighbors in other countries, based on our reflective consciousness of our own history.
- We cannot ignore making a "war regime". Therefore, we will stick to the Peace Constitution, be willing to abandon arms, and resist cooperation for any kinds of war.
- And, we will aim to be reconciled with our neighbors in the Asia-Pacific region and build international bonds of trust, from the perspective of the weak.

The Christian Peace Network was organized by the member churches and organizations of the NCCJ, the Social Commission of the Japan Evangelical Association, Church of Christ in Japan, the Reformed Church in Japan, and the Japan Catholic Council for Justice and Peace. It turned out to be an ecumenical network among a wider range of Christians than ever.

#### **(5) Praying and taking actions**

The activities of the Christian Network for Peace always include *prayers*. In the Christmas season, about a hundred of us sing and tell messages of peace along the sounds of hand bells while caroling on the avenue of Ginza. Many of the people in Japan have a set picture in their minds that Christians are people who are praying quietly in the church. I believe that the Christian Network for Peace in its early period had a role to let people on the street know that the Christians are standing up to take actions with a sense of impending crisis under the political

trend. Shoppers on the street of Ginza were standing still and watching us. Because demonstrations in the past were centered on males who shook their fists and yelled slogans in chorus with anger echoing. The network wanted many people on the street to stop and think what is going on, as sisters and pastors were singing and walking to make peace and protesting against the current politics. We wished that they would become aware of the social trend toward war.

We also had many interfaith gatherings at churches and temples. Buddhists chanted sutras of different denominations. They included “Namu Amida Butsu (Hail Amitabha Buddha)” and “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo (I devote myself to the teachings of Lotus Sutra)”. Muslims chanted Quran and prayed, while Christians sang hymns and prayed the Lord’s Prayer. Each of the religions has its own languages and rituals, but I felt that all of these prayers showed thanks for the gift of life and respect for the creator of life.

#### **(6) Inspired by children – “Don’t change the past! Let’s make a future!”**

In 2001, the situations in world affairs got even worse. In April, the issue of Japanese textbook distorting history arose. The “terror” attacks on September 11 in New York occurred, which made a pretext about Japan making the Anti-Terror Special Countermeasures Law. In November, the U.S. military attacked Afghanistan. And the Maritime Self-Defense Force of Japan was forcibly dispatched to the Indian Ocean in accordance with the Anti-Terror Special Countermeasures Law.

Mr. Kim Yeongjin, then-member of the South Korean National Assembly, staged a protest against the distortion of history in Japanese textbooks by fasting in front of the Japanese Diet building. And then, Mr. Lee Kyung-hae from South Korea went fasting and sat in before the Diet building in protest of then-Japanese prime minister who paid his official visit for worship at Yasukuni Shrine on August 15, the anniversary day of Japan’s defeat in the World War II. Some of us Christians in Japan joined him to stage the protest and sit in.

There were also some children who were taken by adults to join the sit-in. The adults wanted the children to be witnesses of the times as the adults showed the children their sit-in and protest against the grave circumstances that could affect the future of the children.

One day, there came pupils of primary and junior high schools from Kawasaki Church of the Korean Church of Christ in Japan. The children met Kim Yeongjin, who was continuing his fasting

in protest, wrote their thoughts in a notebook there. It read, "Don't change the past! Let's make a future!" These words have kept inspiring many adults until now. That event made me fully realized that we have our responsibility to pass on a peaceful world to the next generation without allowing the errors of aggressions and killings by Japan to be repeated again.

It was also a moment for me to learn that children have the right to know the truth and the ability to feel and think. After that, the NCCJ and the NCCK organized together the Peace Conference of Children representing the Japanese, South Koreans and the Korean residents in Japan, three times for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade primary school children, largely due to the event on this day.

When we held the 1<sup>st</sup> Peace Conference of Children in Hiroshima, we had an experience as follows: on the eve of the last day of the program, some children were talking with one another beneath the bedclothes while making conversations through writing in broken Japanese, Korean and English. "What should we do if South Korea and Japan made another war?", a certain Japanese child murmured. Then, a South Korean child said, "It will be all right. 'Cause we are *chingoo* (meaning friends in Korean)."

We also had an experience like this: when we went to a public bath near the Hiroshima Christian Center with children participants in the conference, some Korean elderly female residents in the area found some of the children speaking in Korean. They said to them, "Welcome" in Korean language, and washed their hair. Those children were surprised to find those elderly women speaking Korean at the public bath in Hiroshima. Even though they did not understand the reason at that time, I am sure that, as they come to learn history in the future and remember that experience at the public bath on that day, the memory will be linked with their historical knowledge and develop from one dimension into two dimensions and become a major event to make peace.

### **(7) Growing out of the grassroots networks**

The Christian Network for Peace and the Interfaith Network for Peace were created by the Christian ecumenical movement centering on the NCCJ. These two networks later became glues to connect various civic groups. In 2002, these networks and groups took out an advertisement to warn against the national emergency legislation. Let's look at a digest of the Christian actions after that.

A video (on the Christian actions with music and pictures on a Power Point. The duration is about 6 minutes.)

You may be already aware that both the Christian Network for Peace and the Interfaith Network for Peace are grassroots networks of people of faith. They are not networks of top leaders of interfaith, denominational and church groups. The Christian Network for Peace and the Interfaith Network for Peace allow its members to pray and act to witness to the world, as persons of faith, no matter if they are lay persons, ministers, or Buddhist priests. That is a wonderful aspect of these networks, but they also have a weakness.

We ought to look back once again. Were Christians or people of faith able to stop the trend toward war? Did we create any activity to be followed by the next generation? Were we sharing messages with people on what peace is inside and outside the churches and temples? Were we able to deliver our messages to politicians? What do you think? Sadly, I am afraid that they were not be able to become a major force to change the national politics. However, at least there were people among those Christians and other people of faith who stepped out of the churches and temples to pray and act and played the roles of breaking the barriers of separation and connecting people as their glues. Without those actions, Japan's move toward war would have advanced in no time. It is not too much to say that the Christian Network for Peace and the Interfaith Network for Peace were able to delay the move by the government of Japan toward war.

Moreover, these grassroots developments led to the establishment of the Interfaith Harmony for the Article 9, a multi-religious, multi-denominational grouping of top religious leaders in April 2005. And that led to the 1<sup>st</sup> Asia Inter-Religious Conference on Article 9 of the Japanese Peace Constitution and developed into the 6<sup>th</sup> Global Inter-religious Conference on Article 9 to be held in Hiroshima from tomorrow. I hope that the NCCJ will act as a mediator between the grassroots networks and the network of top leaders of the religious organizations to ensure a mutual and thorough sharing of developments, and facilitate stronger ties between these networks.

#### **(8) The culture of “nonviolent resistance movement”**

The presence of people of faith helped the culture of “nonviolent resistance movement” among civic groups. Christians and other people of faith have called for practicing the “nonviolent resistance movement” by following the ways of life of Mahatma Gandhi, who advocated for “nonviolence and disobedience” and led the campaigns for India's independence, Rev. Dr. Martin

Luther King Jr., who was active as a leader of Afro-American movements for their civil rights, .Shōkō Ahagon, who led the anti-base movements in Okinawa, and, of course, Jesus Christ. Civic groups across the country have established the principle of nonviolence in directing their gatherings, and the custom to start their gatherings after confirming one another that they would not utter slander against the participants has taken a hold on these gatherings.

There is one important thing that we need to reaffirm; peace building activities are *nonviolent resistance* movements. They are not *nonviolent nonresistance* but *nonviolent resistance* movements. This cannot be carried out without a firm determination, which has been continuously demonstrated by people at Henoko and Takae in Okinawa through their actions to stop the constructions of new military bases. And we can also learn much of this from movements in South Korea. We must be sure to stop negative moves that threaten life and dignity and achieve results of creating peace. Gatherings of Christians and other people of faith must not just remain the so-called“cultural lecture meetings”.

### **(9) Christians speak of *hope***

In the midst of impatience and feelings of despair among civil movements that things have not turned out to be good for them, Christians have continued to advocate *hope*. It is not about explaining biblical words in general terms among the civic groups. It is not about hiding ourselves behind the words, “We are praying”, either. Witness to faith is nothing but being present on the spot, facing the reality, drawing a vision, and taking actions without giving up. Just because we are certain that Jesus Christ shares our sufferings and pains and leads us to a path for solution, we can continue to move on to see the light in spite of our sufferings. I believe that Christians can play a role in speaking of *hope* among civil movements.

## **3. Why the Article 9 now?**

### **(1) Lessons from the Global Article 9 Conference to Abolish War**

Why should we talk about the Article 9 now?

In May 2008, the Global Article 9 Conference to Abolish War was held at several locations including Makuhari Messe in Chiba Prefecture as the main venue. The first part of the Japanese statement of appeal for the conference reads as follows:

“Following the Asia-Pacific War, the Article 9 was legislated as ‘a pledge to the world’ under the understanding that Japan must never wage war again. And for more than 60 years, it has constituted the foundation of trust among people in Japan and the rest of Asia.

Around the world, the chain of violence and war is in progress. The situation in Iraq is becoming mired in a mess, and the Middle East crisis continues. In Asia, there is a pressing need to solve the nuclear issue in the Korean Peninsula. While major powers increase their military budgets for “war against terror”, poverty has increased, and measures on environmental issues are being delayed. In such a context, peace seekers in the world have begun to pay attention to the values of the Article 9. Now that arguments for “constitutional changes” are on the increase in Japan, we would like to think about the significance of the Article 9 together with people in the rest of the world.”

“Peace without the use of force” was the theme of the Global Article 9 Conference. The gathering was so full of enthusiasm that more than 150 guests from 41 countries gathered together, and more than 3,000 people were unable to enter the venue with a seating capacity of 7,000, resulting in their sudden use of the field in front of the main venue as a temporary venue.

I think that the conference could provide understandings of the Article 9 not only from the perspective of war renunciation, but also from much more different angles.

I was a member of the executive committee for this conference, and the YWCA held the Workshop to Share with Children the Article 9 for a Nuclear-Free Earth.

I remember that the Global Article 9 Conference had some keywords as follows:

- Conflict resolution through dialogue
- Reallocation of military budget for people
- Removal of military bases and protection of the environment
- Creating a nuclear-free, peaceful Asia
- Making a sustainable society that cares for everyone

At this conference, we discussed what we could do to make use of the values of the Article 9 for world peace based on these keywords. The Article 9 is a short clause. But I learned from the Global Article 9 Conference that the clause consisting of just two sections can provide *hope* that peace-loving people in the world can find not only for war renunciation but also for conflict

prevention, restoration of human rights, sustainable environment, economic stability, and so on. The Article 9 of the Constitution can help building up a philosophy based on its values. I realized that it is a treasure of Japan and a treasure of the world indeed. Through protecting the Article 9 of the Constitution and spreading the values of the Article 9, I think that Japan can contribute to the peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula.

However, the reality is that it is not entirely treasured now. Citizens in Japan are determined more than ever to stop the trend of changing the Constitution that the current administration under Prime Minister Abe aims for, based on their repentance of its history of war of aggression, provide school and public educations to reaffirm the significance and values of the Article 9, and make the Article 9 a treasure in the real sense.

## **(2) What is the Article 9 for Christians?**

What is the Article 9 for us Christians? For me, the Article 9 is a *prayer*. I believe that the Article 9 is a very concrete form of *prayer* to bring justice, peace, forgiveness, life and love onto the earth. The values of the Article 9 that are built in the clause deny all forms of violence. They demand “NO!” of everything that brings *death*, and declare “YES” to everything that cares for *life*. I think that, for Christians, the Article 9 is a very concrete form of words of the Biblical teaching that is written in the Constitution.

Not only the Article 9. The ideal of the Constitution of Japan overlaps the message in the biblical words. It is the message that we as Christians are not to regard ourselves as absolute, that we listen to the views of minorities and voices of the voiceless and defend and respect their dignity. I see Jesus Christ’s way of life in the philosophy of the constitutionalism of the Constitution.

The Article 13 says, “All of the people shall be respected as individuals”, as the Constitution is based on constitutionalism with the ultimate aim of respecting each person as an individual. Attorney Makoto Ito of Hogakukan Law Office points out that it has two aspects that “everyone is equal” and that “everyone is different”.

“Everyone is equal” means that everyone should be respected as a human being. It means that everyone must be cared for as a human being. Based on these philosophies, the Constitution of Japan shows the idea that one person should never be sacrificed for the society. Mr. Ito explains it by using the following riddle:

*“Suppose that there is one innocent person among ten dangerous criminals who were arrested. But what if nobody knows which one is that person? The Constitution considers that, in such a case, one person must not be sacrificed for the society. Even if nine of the ten dangerous criminals are to be released, one of the ten who was arrested for a false charge must not be forcibly sacrificed. You could go even so far as to say that all of the ten persons are to be released under the Constitution.”*

This riddle overlaps with the biblical story of the shepherd who has one hundred sheep and looks for one lost sheep. The shepherd does his utmost for just one sheep even if he leaves ninety-nine of them behind there. In the same way as this biblical story, the Constitution considers that not even one person should be sacrificed for the majority in the society. The spirit of the clause that “[a]ll of the people shall be respected as individuals” is underlying throughout the whole Constitution.

“Everyone is equal” means that the person is respected as an individual. At the same time, the Constitution has another aspect that “everyone is different”. The spirit of respecting individuals that underlies the Constitution is that the abundance of everyone being different is regarded as important, and that the person is respected as precious individuals. It is that you are who you are and the only one person who is a precious being in the world.

When I make an approach to the Peace Constitution that has the Article 9 from a Christian point of view, I am confident that peace can be made by protecting and making the most of this. That is where I find hope.

I am etching in my mind the biblical words in Deuteronomy 30:19 in the Old Testament, “Choose life so that you and your descendants may live”. It is my sincere desire that the way we are living now lead to a peaceful world to be handed down to the next generation.