

"At one theater an exciting play was in progress. As it went on, all of a sudden, some people sitting in front rows stood up on their feet, hoping to take a better look at what was going on on the stage. Having been blocked the view, those in the following back rows were tempted to also stand up, which they eventually did. People in the further back rows were left with no other choices than to do likewise themselves. “Before one came to notice, the whole audience in the theater was on their feet so as to secure a better view.”

**Japan’s neighbors remain sensitive (alert)**

Korea is very sensitive to political changes and responses Japan makes. A claim gets any Korean furious of Dokto/Takeshima being a part of Japanese territory. And, Japan naming East Sea ‘the Sea of Japan’, or its politicians worshiping at Yasukuni Shrine, for instance, make the people of Korea ever so agitated. The Wednesday Prayer Meeting by those old ladies, once called “comfort women” of the Japanese military, is still today conducted every week at the heart of Seoul.

Korea suffered invasion by Japan and was put under its colonial rule for 36 years. During those decades, many of our people were taken to Japan by force and conscripted accordingly. There, many died, and many more injured. Germany and Italy, the war-criminal states that triggered World War II, confessed their past sins and repented. They then made profound efforts to give assuring relief to their neighbors. Because of that, a new Germany when uniting the once divided nation faced little resistance coming from its neighboring countries. Japan yet, on the contrary, has not won the hearts and minds of the people of Korea, China, and Southeast Asian countries which it invaded, thus not being trusted ever, because it has not made sincere apologies to them.

Japan today is the second economic power of the world. Before the eyes of Asian countries as well as the world community at large, it has yet been unable to successfully demonstrate its leadership that is on a par with its economic might. It is because Japan has been, and still is, viewed by its neighbors with skepticism of
becoming a military giant again. It is, further, because they regard Japan not as a
country that would make efforts for peace in East Asia, but, rather, as a country that
puts high priority on gaining its own profit alone without due, straightforward regret
over its past wrongdoings.

**Importance of Article 9 of the Peace Constitution**

In November of 1946, Japan enacted its so-called Peace Constitution. It was an
anti-war as well as a peace constitution in that it renounces war of any kind (excepting
the right to self-defense) and also states clearly that “land, sea, and air forces, as well
as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state
will not be recognized.” However passively Japan might have consented to enact this
constitution as a defeated nation at that time, still it is a peace constitution,
unprecedented throughout the world history to this date. Recently, however, Japan’s
lawmakers have passed a bill of national referendum through which the
long-cherished Article 9 could be amended. To such a move, a grave concern has been
expressed by many conscientious elements within Japanese society along with
religious people. Similar voices of concern have come up from among peace and
friendship organizations in Korea and China. They all oppose possible amendment of
the constitution. They do so on the ground, for one, that the very ghost of militarism
might revive in Japan if and when the present constitution should be changed. The
nightmare of the Pacific War has not been forgotten by many.

**Teaching of respect for every life, or that of ‘Do not kill living things’**

In its teachings, Buddhism has five important commandments that we have to
observe. A first is that of ‘Do-not-kill’. It says we should not kill wantonly any life that
is alive and living. When it comes to sense a deadly danger, even a small creature like
an earthworm writhes so as to escape to safety. Let alone a human being.

A war, an invasion of other nations’ lands just for the interest of your own country,
costs many people’s lives, and gives pains especially to the vulnerable populace like
women, the aged, and children. A war, therefore, is an extreme form and system of
killing in that sense. Precisely because of that, a war should not take place nor should
be planned or prepared in any way by anybody. An attempt of amending Article 9 is
simply equal to a Japan’s will to maintain hegemony over the region in question by
equipping itself with military power, the means of war. It betrays the teaching of
“do-not-kill”.

**Japan’s re-armament and support of the US**

Militaristic forces in Japan are dreaming of a re-armed Japan while reflecting little over
the past wars of invasion. The US, on the other hand, endorses the Japan’s agenda for
re-armament, mainly due to its deep concern over China’s hegemony challenge in the
region, based on China’s economic growth in the years to come. In order to check
China, the US is trying to re-shuffle its military system in East Asia so as for the
Japan-based US power to be able to extend its control even over the Korean Peninsula. While these moves are in the making, Japan tries to become an “ordinary country”, as it says, that can resort to starting a war by replacing the US, with its consent, in terms of the defense role of the said region.

Japan tries to build up public sentiment that would come to demand its re-armament by raising the domestic tension level on the pretext of such threats of north Korea as, among others, its nuclear weapons development project and the issue of abduction of Japanese nationals. In January this year what used to be the Defense ‘Agency’ was promoted to the Defense ‘Ministry’. Hand in glove with the US world strategy, Japan is strenuously building up its gigantic military power so as to become a state exercising hegemony over Asia. Through strengthening the alliance with the US, Japan makes all the efforts of completing a military layout by which dispatching Japanese troops overseas just as it pleases may become possible with ‘the cause of the UN’ as an almighty excuse for it.

How can we sit still and let go such Japan’s military expansionist steps, one after another in front of our eyes? Why? Because Japan’s past deeds of invading Korea drove hundreds and thousands of Koreans into the war, many of them died and injured having been used as human shield, and as for women, they were also rounded up as so-called “comfort women” to become sex slaves. In addition, a number of activists for independence of Korea were tortured, imprisoned, and put to death. Despite such grave acts against the people of Korea, Japan has not yet showed any sincere repentance, but instead devotes itself to building up military power. How can we regard Japan as one of peace-loving nations?

**East Asia going against the world trend of disarmament**

Contrary to the growing atmosphere of arms reduction throughout the world, an arms race is on the go in East Asia, just here alone on the globe. Korean Peninsula has long witnessed its own version of arms race in face of the conflict between North and South. China in the region, too, is rapidly building up its military might. These currents are only contributing good excuses for Japan of joining the arms race itself and becoming a military super-power. It is such change on the part of Japan that north-east Asia is mapped by the rest of the world community not as a peaceful region helping to build world peace but rather as a dangerous region whereby military expansion races are in the making growingly.

The move of amending Peace Constitution of Japan is not an issue that only involves Japanese people alone. It does affect many a country in Asia and the rest of the world. This is ever so true to China, Korea and other Asian countries that were once in history invaded by Japan. Article 9 is a safety device for keeping peace in East Asia and in the rest of the world as well. Not only that, it has a potential to provide a very important ground for Japan to be able to exercise its leadership as a peace-loving country.
What should be done for peace in East Asia?

Then, what should we be doing after all? First of all, people of all religions must pronounce peace messages that denounce war and arms race, and devote so as to become peace keepers and peace makers themselves as well as educating their own people in that direction.

The religious along with civic groups in Japan and Korea as leading forces must monitor every war preparation that their own government makes, organize a number of rallies in opposition to such preparatory actions, persuade leaders of all walks of social organizations, and finally win sympathy and support from the people. They should disclose to the general public the very fact that the arms expansion for a security purpose simply leads to a more serious threat to the security of Japan and to this particular region in question.

We are called to further deploy joint actions and concrete activities through close solidarity and by setting up networks of standing (permanent) nature as well as smooth communications channels among religious and civic groups of East Asia that are already deploying such activities. Keeping all these mechanisms operative and workable, we are also called to closely cooperate with various peace forces of the world so as to pay due efforts of peace making in this East Asian region.

Each and every religious man and woman should acquire peace-based sensitivity as well as enlightenment (awakening) as the one who is directly concerned with the question of peace, and should keep making every effort of forwarding and reflecting upon peace-spirituality.

A final remark

Japan is a beautiful country. It is our neighbor country, too. Rather than hating and feuding with one another based solely on past wounds, let us try to look at a lot of futures that we are to appreciate. If Korea and Japan, and China as well, resolve today to advance close cooperation with one another, they will set themselves a good model case of unprecedented prosperity and peaceful development as an economic community, a political community and a peace community in north-east Asia, thus contributing a lot to the whole world and the human kind. Japan is an important member of the north-east Asian regional community. That's why it should speak up on peace more aggressively. That's why, also, it should try to give more trust and hopes to the neighboring countries.

Back to the lesson at the beginning

If in a theater people stand up one row after another in reaction to standing-ups of front rows, the theater will be eventually filled with people standing up on their feet, resulting that a large majority being unable to enjoy the show after all. In order to appreciate what goes on right on the stage, we have to make those trying to get on their own feet be seated somehow. In order to make them all be seated, you who
realized that key (point) should be the one who sits down first. A problem begins to see the light of solution only when and where you succeed to have others sit down by sitting down yourselves.

The reason why we oppose amending Article 9 of the Peace Constitution, let me emphasize here again, is not just to oppose any political programs of the government of Japan, but to advance peace in East Asia, and also to help Japan to become a country that may exercise more and greater leadership in a world community as a peace-loving nation.

In the midst of such an “up-rising”, the one who first decides dare to sit down so that others might follow and therefore every body can enjoy the show, is the important peace-maker. A role of a peace-maker in north-east Asia, busy racing in an arms race, sails out when that very peace-maker begins to reduce its own armament programs. Article 9 of Japan’s Peace Constitution is exactly a stipulation which can play that role.