From Ainu Mosir Hokkaido: Sodane-
Rev. KOGA Kiyotaka (CMIM Counselor, Church of Christ in Japan Hokkaido Presbytery Mission Minister)

As this year’s CMIM Youth Forum will take place in Ainu Mosir, or Hokkaido, I’d like to write a few words to arouse interest.

Right now in Hokkaido, the north island of Japan, there is a campaign to celebrate “150 Years of Hokkaido,” as opposed to “150 Years from the Meiji Restoration.” Within that campaign there is only scant awareness of the existence and history of the Ainu people. Many readers will know that, with the exception of Ainu and other northern peoples, all present residents of Hokkaido are migrated settlers and their descendants. However, the reality is that awareness of this fact dissipates over decades and centuries, and we fall into the illusions that this has been our land from the beginning.

One key cause of this is many people, who belonged to Hon (feudal domains) that were labeled “rebel armies” during the civil wars of the late Edo and early Meiji (1850s and 60s), had their lands confiscated by the new Meiji government and were forced to migrate. It was these people who, spurred by frustration, anger and a determination to redeem their names, bore the hard labors of “development” in the Ainu land. Also relevant, I think, is the nature of relations with ex-legionaries, who were sent north to guard against Russia while surveilling the settlers. While low-rank samurai hailed from han that overthrew the Bakufu (Edo Shogunate) became large-scale landholders, I have heard that many who hailed from han that remained loyal to the Bakufu were sent into inhospitable grasslands and isolated islands in the north-most regions, where not a few of them died of starvation or cold.

In fact, in Hokkaido we find Japan’s modern history condensed and encapsulated, as the circumstances and consciousness of the time of migration continues to be retold in every district and family, to varying degrees. Many things overlap within these stories: Arrogance and pride that is backed by state policy; Humiliation and grudges that come from being labeled “rebels” and excluded; Memory of severe hardships experienced by those who first cultivated the land ... Furthermore, it is not uncommon to find villages, towns and cities that began as former-Bakufu-side settlements located very near to others that began as new-government-side communities, or to find a vague sense of estrangement still present between them.

Be that as it may, the fact remains that Wajin (People of Wa, or mainland Japan) as a whole, regardless of their status vis a vis the central government, participated in this domestic colonization project, which was based on a one-sided declaration of Terra Nullius and the usurpation of land without any consultation with the Ainu people. But, because they give such great weight to their humiliations and hardships of pioneering life, I feel this is making it difficult to squarely face the realities of discrimination toward the Ainu people. I suspect this is also related to the most important fact that modern Japanese history as a whole has advanced under the construct and value system of “civilized” versus “barbaric.” This construct, which is shared by most Japanese people irrespective of their political, ideological and religious stances, is the principal culprit that justifies invasive expansionism and renders neighbors invisible. Christianity, too, which was dissatisfied with the omission of Christianity from the “Japanese spirit, Western learning” ideal promoted by the Meiji government, went no further than to claim that it was Christianity that spiritually solidified “civilization” within that framework.

I say this not to fan enmity, but in hope that it may help us to think about where the major challenges lie as we try to overcome the various forms of discrimination and exclusionism that permeate Japanese society. Why is Japan such a closed, exclusionist society, and why does it not value human rights? I cannot help but think it is deeply related to the fact that Japanese people (Wajin) have not become fully conscious of, nor overcome, the historical fault lines and enmities among themselves.

The Church of Christ in Japan is no exception. However, under the promise of unity in Jesus Christ, who destroyed enmity by the Cross, the Gospel of reconciliation is spread through our taking up specific and concrete challenges together. As it says in Acts 6:7, “So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.” I pray that, as we take into account historical developments as “inhabitants” of the Japan archipelago, the work of this Center will contribute to the realization of a multicultural, inclusive society that goes beyond simple “segregated coexistence.” Society today would not be viable—in Hokkaido or across Japan—without foreign workers, but our government authorities steadfastly refuse to institute immigration and other policies that protect their human rights. This despite the fact that Japan is a veritable “Immigration giant,” ranking 4th among 39 OECD countries in the number of incoming migrants. I believe that at the root of this is a sense of fear that comes from never having been liberated from the pre-war doctrine of family nation, which views the Emperor as head of household, nor from the post-war myth of Japan as a mono-ethnic nation. But “the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.” (II Timothy 1:7)

So don’t let weighty thoughts keep you away. Come, join us with a light heart. Sodane!*

(Note: Sodane* means “Yes, I agree,” or “That’s right” in friendly, Hokkaido dialect. The phrase became popular during the 2018 winter Olympics, when members of Japan’s women’s curling team used often—with Hokkaido charm and accent—on their way to a bronze medal.)
International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

On March 21, approximately 70 people attended the CMIM-hosted Citizens' Rally for the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. In her keynote speech, human rights lawyer Ms. MOROKOA Yasuko provided an overview of the current human rights situation in Japan, and of preparations for Japan’s review by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in August. This was followed by a series of “minority voices.”

Mr. HIGASHITANI Makoto described how deep-rooted discrimination toward the Buraku community wreaks havoc on individuals and families even now, and stressed the need for a legal framework that would counter discrimination more effectively than current “philosophical” laws. Mr. KIM Youngsoo, a Korean in Japan who lives in Okinawa, spoke about the importance of recognizing that pains others than our own exist in the world, while Mr. TAIRA Aika who is from Okinawa pointed to the externalized comment, “Sorry about the serious situation in Okinawa,” and emphasized the importance of not only “sympathizing with the pain of another,” but of recognizing the possibility that “I might be stepping on your foot” and sympathizing with the “anger” of the person who is being stepped on. Ms. SON Hoesook, who has been working to eliminate discrimination toward Korean ethnic schools, talked about the personal situation of Korean youth, who feel cornered by hate and are wavering in their identity, and its connection with the structures of violence that oppress minorities. Mr. ABE Yuto from Ainu Moisir (Hokkaido) explained with indignation that the “New Ainu Law” of 1997 was, in the final analysis, nothing more than a tool to promote Hokkaido tourism, not a recognition of the Ainu people’s indigenous rights. Ms. Lenny Tolentino, who is engaged in support for immigrant women, asked if our ears were fully open to listen, before telling the stories of a few women to illustrate the uncertainties and challenges experienced by immigrant women and their children under immigration laws of Japan. The Rally concluded with the reading of a declaration, which called upon the government and law-makers of Japan to declare commitment to eliminate hate crime, to improve the enforceability of the anti-hate crime law of 2016, and to introduce a Basic Law for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination that fulfills Japan’s commitment to the world.

A “Prayer Gathering” followed in which, guided by 9 sculptures by the German artist Ernst Barlach who was persecuted under Nazi rule, CMIM Steering Committee members, youth and supporters read a litany of heartfelt prayers. The prayers seemed to peel away the “coating” that causes us to not see the dark parts of society that are obscured in busy daily life, and helped us to look directly at the brokenness and failures of our selves, our church and our society.

At the next day’s consultation, minority community representatives shared their thoughts on CMIM’s mission, and participants affirmed the need to confront heavy tasks, not in isolation, but together, by creating opportunities to deepen mutual understanding and support.

Youth Café #7
Reconciliation that begins from a blanket
~Learning from the mission work of KAIROS Canada~

For CMIM’s 7th Youth Café event we welcomed a special guest from Canada, Ms. Janette McIntosh, who shared about the work of KAIROS Canada, an ecumenical organization engaged in social, economic and ecological justice issues, including reconciliation with Canada’s First Peoples. Last year Canada marked the 150th anniversary of its “birth as a nation.” However, for the original peoples who lived upon the vast land since before the migration of Western Europeans, this history is one that cannot be celebrated unreservedly. Under colonialism the First Peoples had not only their land, but their language and many aspects of their culture taken away. Christian churches were also complicit in this colonial subjugation, not least through the residential school system.

In recent years the government and churches of Canada have finally acknowledged and apologized for their sins against First Peoples, and the KAIROS Blanket Exercise (KBE) is a unique, interactive teaching tool through which participants experience this “negative history” of Canada. Many participants are clearly shaken as they follow colonization’s cruel steps enacted upon blankets spread under their feet. The impact of re-learning one’s own history, not just through the mind but using the whole body, must be very powerful.

I was most struck, however, by these words of explanation: "This program is not meant to make participants feel guilty, but to give them hope.” Confronting history that we would rather look away from, the story of the victimizer, is not at all masochistic. Rather, it is a necessary first step toward building a peaceful future.

At this café we received only an explanation, but there is a plan to conduct a KBE as part of the Minority Youth Forum to be held in Hokkaido in September. We “know” that in Hokkaido the lands of the Ainu people were taken from them in the name of “development,” but we don’t really understand. If we want to walk toward a future world that’s free of discrimination, perhaps we first need to stand upon the same ground, the solid ground of common historical understanding.

( Yanagawa Tomoki, Jesuit Social Center, Tokyo )
Two Education Resource Projects are Moving Ahead!

A: Learning from our colorful friends

Last year, in collaboration with Galkikyo (National Conference of Christians Seeking Institution of a Basic Law for Non-Japanese Residents) and the National Christian Council in Japan Committee on the Human Rights of Foreigners, we held a series of 4 “Colorful Cafés,” where we invited guests with various national backgrounds to talk about their experiences of life in Japan: 1. Ms. AFUSO Juli, a born-in-Japan Japanese-Brazilian with family roots in Okinawa; 2. Ms. KOJIMA Hiromi, a Japanese-Peruvian who moved to Japan with her family as a young child; 3. Ms. EVSADAN Irene, a Nigerian-Japanese “double” who grew up on a farm in rural Gifu prefecture; and 4. Mr. NOH Hyooyang, a South Korean who came to Japan as an adult, married a Japanese partner and is now a minister. Having a “colorful” background offers special joys, but also presents a variety of struggles, pains and isolation. Café participants learned many things from their talks about growing up and living in Japan, and we wanted to share these lessons more broadly with young people. We commissioned artist Ms. MINAMI Nanami to render the four guests’ stories as comics, and set out to develop a teaching resource for middle- and high-school students. The booklet is now nearing completion!

“White people can’t rap,” “Germans always drink beer”... Among our perspectives on daily events, there might be some that should receive a checkup. “Immigrants are living off our taxes,” “Gay people don’t play soccer”... In a society that deems it good to demand and celebrate strength, such skewed statements can spread as if they were true.

This game-like teaching resource from Germany is a racism checkup tool that is widely used in schools there. It alerts students to biases that lurk in commonly-heard statements, and encourages examination of the process by which we internalized such biases without knowing. Both fun and serious, it teaches players to examine facts and think more deeply. We have established a working group to develop a Japanese version of the game, and new participants are welcome. When completed we look forward to working with schools, etc. that might welcome a workshop using this tool.

B: A card game to make us think about racism

A personal reflection on the Japan-Korea-Zaichi (Korean in Japan) Cooperative Program

Annual Spring Retreat

When I first arrived at the Seminar I was surprised by how many young people were attending from Korea. The atmosphere was great. It was interesting to talk and have fun with everyone, but our program also had some serious aspects. We met with Korean halmoni (grandmothers), some who came to Japan even before WWII. They told their stories about how they came to Japan and lived their lives as a minority here. As someone who had only read about Koreans in Japan, I was grateful for this opportunity. But I was not the only one. Other participants were also thankful to the elderly ladies for their stories, and the chance to ask questions. We all agreed, that we should not just listen but also keep their stories in our hearts, to always remember what happened and how horrible war and hate can be. One day these ladies will be gone, so we the next generation must learn, cherish and pass on their experiences. After that we walked through the Sakuramoto district of Kawasaki. I’ve visited Kyoto, Tokyo, Ise, Osaka and so on, but this introduction to a working-class neighbourhood where old slums used to be, was an eye-opening experience for me. The next day we had a great presentation by Rev. Nakamura, about LGBT issues in Japan and around the world. In his presentation he spoke about the problems that LGBT People face, including discrimination in churches. As a future Pastor I was inspired by Kipyung Nam, who blesses same sex people in Korea even though he could get punished for that. I asked him what was his reason, because opponents tend to use the Bible as an excuse to suppress LGBT People. His answer was simple: “It is just my job.” Although the answer does not sound like much, it showed me that it is something totally natural for a pastor to bless all people, not just a few. We also had the chance to listen to two LGBT People, one woman who self-identifies as a man, and a young man who came out as a homosexual. Both of them told us how they struggled in life, and how they managed to keep their faith even after facing hardship. The girl’s name was Luka. She is a drummer in a Christian metal band. After telling her that I’m interested in Metal music she gave me a CD with 3 Songs on it. The Name of the Band is Soul of Fate and the music is really great. Dan was the guy who talked about his experiences as a homosexual in a conservative church. I was inspired by his effort to find a way to resolve the standards that humans impose upon each other, using Philosophy. After each day we talked in small Groups about what we learned and experienced. It was a great thing to be able to share my own experiences and reflections, while also hearing different points of view. Our Days always ended with a visit to a sento (local public bath) and conversation over beer and snacks. I will cherish this experience and the friendships I made with the inspiring, interesting and funny people I met.

Denis Schödlor
Theological Intern, Evangelical Mission in Solidarity
CMIM Activity Log (December~March)

Mar. 1
Gaikokuyi (National Conference of Christians Seeking Institution of a Basic Law for Non-Japanese Residents) meeting in Yokohama

Mar. 2-10
Evangelical Mission in Solidarity Interim Chair, Dr. Dennis Scholl, welcomed at CMIM

Mar. 12
Educational visit to Yasku School in Minami-Kagawa

Mar. 13
Eliminate Racial Discrimination (ERD) Network meeting in Tokyo

Mar. 16-18
United Church of Christ in Japan Missionary Conference, Hiroshima

Mar. 15
National Christian Council in Japan (NCCJ) Ecumenism Orientation Program for New Seminary Graduates

Mar. 18-30
NCG General Assembly in Tokyo

Mar. 20
International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (IERD) Assembly @NCG National House of Councilors Office Building

Mar. 21
NCG General Secretary Rev. Uzi Hong-Jung visits CMIM

Mar. 21
CMIM Citizens’ Assembly (CMIM/2014 No event) at Keio YMCAs in Tokyo

Mar. 21
CMIM Ecumenical Prayer Service (CMIM event) at Keio YMCAs in Tokyo

Mar. 26-27
Church of Christ in Japan Under-19 Retreat – presentation (K)

Apr. 5
CMIM Youth Committee meeting

Apr. 6-10
Korean Christian Church in Japan (KCCJ) Human Rights Symposium, Kyoto – presentation (K)

Apr. 10
6th Article 9 Global Inter-Religious Conference planning meeting (M)

Apr. 12
Symposium: “Unbundling Bigotry: Reflections on Religious Diversity” @National Institute for the Public Policy Office Building (M)

Apr. 14
Tokyo YWCA “Kengo (Construction) Café” – lecture (K)

Apr. 20
Anti-discrimination educational card game planning meeting

May 9
4th CMIM Steering Committee meeting

May 21
Youth Café #7 KAIROS: Canadian churches’ walk toward reconciliation and peace. Guest: Ms. Kariya, KAIROS SC volunteer

May 23-24
Korea-North Korea NCG Symposium Gaikokuyi International Symposium 2018 @Seoul, Korea (K)

May 27-28
6th Article 9 Global Inter-Religious Conference planning meeting at Hiroshima (M)

May 29
KCG Tokyo Church worship service (M)

May 31
Korea Interfaith Dialogue of Young Buddhists and Muslims in Asia – guests: Hiroshi Nakamura (CII Chairman) and Sonho Chang (KOEES Exec. Sec.) (M)

Jun. 1
3rd meeting of the CMIM Board of Counsellors

Jun. 3
Public Seminar: “Let us think together about Hate Speech” @Kyobunkan (K)

Jun. 11
Visit from Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church, Rev. SHERAIKA MIYAKO & Rev. TAKAYA Inokuchi

Jun. 15
Anti-discrimination educational card game planning meeting

Jun. 22
Visit by Taiyo Ward Office Multicultural Coexistence Prevention Section staff, Ms. WATANABE Asaka & Ms. ABE Haruko (K)

Jun. 17
CMIM Youth Committee meeting

Jun. 22
FEB/C Japanese Broadcasting Station – interview (K)

Jun. 26
University of the Sacred Heart – lecture (K)

Jun. 26-June 29
University of the Sacred Heart – lecture (K)

Jun. 29
KUETSU, University of Tokyo – lecture (K)

Jun. 30
Assembly to mark 2nd anniversary of the Act on the Promotion of Efforts to Eliminate Unfair Disciplinary Speech and Behavior Against Persons Originating from Overseas and Japan and promote an improved basic law for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination @House of Councillors Diet Members’ Hall (M)

Please support CMIM’s mission!

CMIM has four core activities:

a. Struggle Against Racism
b. Engage in Youth Mission
c. Develop a Spirituality of Reconciliation and Peace
d. Communicate with Partners in Japan and Abroad

CMIM is supported by churches and Christian organizations in Japan, through prayer, financial contributions and the appointment of representatives to the Center’s Board of Counsellors and Steering Committee. Support also comes from churches overseas, and a growing number of individual members. Through dialogue, mutual learning and collaborative advocacy with ecumenical and civil society partners, CMIM seeks to be a faithful, effective hub in the struggle against intolerance. Please join our mission by becoming a member, or by participating in our activities. Let us spread the tent of inclusion together!

Individual membership: ¥3,000 or more
Institutional membership: ¥10,000 or more

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