In the 1990s, a dance called Krump became popular among mostly African American youth in the South-Central district of Los Angeles. This art form was born when these young people channeled their daily struggles into dance, as a creative way to be and express themselves. Krump teaches us that human beings, even in the midst of anguish and pain, are not simply bound to defeat.

When Mary visited Elizabeth, she must have spoken about the worries and struggles that burdened her, as a woman pregnant before marriage. To this Elizabeth replied, “Blessed are you...” I believe these words were meant to encourage Mary. Elizabeth accepted Mary as she was and was saying to her, “You worry and struggle because you are trying to live life earnestly. That is what it means to live.”

In telling this story of two women sharing what it means to live, Luke uses the expression “...filled with the Holy Spirit.” And when Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, Luke writes that the child in her womb “leaped.” This happened, I think, because Mary found joy in life when she saw Elizabeth, and Elizabeth in turn received the fervor of this joy. And the child in her womb expressed the joy of life, too, as if to say, “God, I am alive here in Your history. Starting to live. And so I dance!”

This dance of joy overlaps with the youth who dance Krump, seeking what it means to be alive. They teach us that we are all equipped with the feeling of faith, a certainty that the meaning of life will be given to us.

The figures of Mary and Elizabeth show to us the fervor of those who choose to live, despite struggles and perplexities. I believe Jesus’ footsteps enable us to retrieve this fervor of humanity, precisely because He was born and raised amid such human fervor. I pray that we, too, will receive the human fervor that Jesus imparted, and continue to walk toward deliverance from discrimination.

Yamashita Soki, Minister at UCCJ Abeno Church
Nationwide Buraku Liberation Conference in Hokkaido: Discrimination in the Land of the Ainu
Held in Chitose Eiko Church and in Niptani

The BLC held its 13th Nationwide Buraku Liberation Conference June 26-28, 2017 in the northern island of Hokkaido. As would be expected from its location, this year's conference was held with special emphasis on the Ainu people. The director of the Ainu People Information Center of the Hokkai District, Miura Tadao, gave a lecture in which he outlined the history and culture of the Ainu people and the various types of discrimination that they have experienced right up into the present time. These include the types of discrimination they experience in daily life, but also such things as the desecration of their graves by Hokkaido University professors digging up bones for examination and the lack of action by the national government in addressing issues faced by Ainu people. On the 27th, we took a field trip to the Niptani section of Biratori-cho, where about 70% of the population is of Ainu ancestry. Previous to the building of the Niptani Dam, many Ainu lived and worked in the area that is now under water behind the dam. There were also numerous cultural and religious sites that were sacred to the Ainu that we destroyed by the dam. We listened as our guide told us of how they tried to sue to stop the destruction of the Ainu culture there, but to no avail. We also listened to a presentation by the director of the Ainu Museum, Kayano Shiro, concerning the history of relations between the Ainu and Japanese and the many ways Ainu people are awakening to their heritage. Kayano is the son of Kayano Shigeru, who is the only Ainu to ever serve in parliament during its 150 years of history, and who also is responsible for bringing together the various artifacts on display in the museum.

Wada Ken'ichi, the chair of the executive committee of the Tochigi Prefecture branch of the Buraku Liberation League, also gave a lecture, in which he showed that when history is viewed from the perspective of an administrator of a buraku village during the Edo period who acted as both a representative of the government and a policeman, the image of a discriminated­against buraku becomes very different. He also emphasized the importance of looking at minority human rights issues from the standpoint of international human rights standards.

During the Bible Study session, retired Canadian missionary Robert Witmer gave a talk entitled, "Aiming For a World in Which Nothing Threatens Us," in which he spoke of experiences of the native peoples of Canada and how the
Sadiri, we incoming a message in which being called to weakness is not a form of denying oneself but of coming to know the power of God. On the closing day, we discussed together the future activities of the Buraku Liberation Center and how to achieve the goals of those activities. I'm very thankful for the many meaningful interactions I had with others and the time of prayer and learning we shared together.

Participating in the Nationwide Buraku Liberation Conference in Hokkaido
Imamura Yasuko

As one living in Nagasaki in Kyushu, going to Hokkaido in June was something I dreamed about doing. That season in Kyushu is a hot and muggy season, and so being able to spend 3 days under the clear blue skies of Hokkaido was really special. It gave me the opportunity to be able to think by myself.

I have been able to attend this nationwide conference held once every 2 years in various places around the country several times before. While I can't really express it well in words, I think I've participated for the purpose of being able to both to first recognize and then seek freedom from the discrimination in my own heart and to also seek liberation from my self-imposed isolation as one who is discriminated against. What stuck most in my mind was when Mr. Witmer said, "Everyone is seeking a place where they can feel safe and be themselves." I felt anew that this conference provided a place where we could talk and pray together for a world where there is nothing that threatens us.

Through this conference, I was able to meet many people who helped enlighten me. The term "discrimination" can be overwhelming, with all of various types of discrimination one often has to live through, including buraku discrimination, together with discrimination against ethnic minority groups, people with handicapping conditions and gender discrimination. Often, the pain people encounter in those absurd situations cannot be shared except through our meeting together. I feel their pain as the wounds are opened up through people telling of their difficult experiences and history. I'm always asking myself if I can really fully relate to the pain someone like that is expressing. But this time, as we interacted with the Ainu people and their rich culture, I felt renewed anger at how that culture, along with the very language they spoke had all been stripped from them just a few decades ago.
The Human Rights of Minorities As Viewed From the Standards of International Human Rights

Wada Ken'ichi, Chair of the Executive Committee of the Tochigi Prefecture Branch of the Buraku Liberation League
(The following is a translation of the closing portion of Wada’s presentation at the Nationwide Buraku Liberation Conference held in Hokkaido in June 2017)

VII. Making Functional the International Convention on Human Rights

The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and Buraku Discrimination

Lastly, I would like to touch on the issue of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and how that relates to the issue of making the International Convention on Human Rights more functional. ICERD was ratified by the United Nations in 1965, which, as you know, was when the issue of apartheid in South Africa was reaching a crisis stage. It was also a time that saw the rise of the neo-Nazi movement in Germany and many African nations becoming independent. Thus, the ICERD was ratified in a climate where racial discrimination was of crisis proportions throughout the world.

Japan, however, only joined this convention in 1995, some 30 years after the fact. There are two reasons why it took so long.

First of all, there is the issue of the definition of human rights as defined in the first article of the ICERD. The term "racial discrimination" is described with 5 terms: race, skin color, national or ethnic origin, and descent. The term "descent" has to do with social status and one’s bloodline or lineage. Thus, "descent" would certainly include those of buraku descent, but because the Japanese government wanted to avoid this issue, they translated it with an obscure word and have been claiming that the buraku issue wasn't related to "descent." The convention committee did point that out to them specifically, and we have confirmed with the committee that both the outcasts of India and the Burakumin in Japan are included in that term. Thus, this is one point at which the Japanese government and the United Nations are in conflict.

The other point is with respect to article 4, which criminalizes such discrimination and deals with punishment for such infractions. With respect to criminalizing discrimination and meeting out punishment, the Japanese government’s response has been, "Those who discriminate have the right of free speech and association, which are guaranteed by the constitution. Thus, we cannot ratify this portion of the convention, since we cannot implement a law banning discriminatory actions." These are the reasons that so greatly delayed Japan’s entry into the accord.

I was able to attend the ICERD committee meeting in 2014 in Geneva. I took with me a DVD I had recorded of a 5-minute portion of a "hate demonstration" in Korea Town in the Shinokubo section of Tokyo so that I could give this information to the committee as they dealt with the report submitted by the
Japanese government. After viewing the DVD, one of the members immediately responded, "There were policemen there at the scene. Why didn't they arrest those people?" When I responded that this demonstration had received permission from the public safety commission and that the Japanese government stated that these people had the right to free expression, the committee members were aghast. Thus, I really want you to understand how wide the gap is between the views of those in power in Japan and international standards of human rights.

The ICERD committee recognizes the concept of the "pyramid of hate" with respect to hate speech. In other words, hate speech is not simply badmouthing someone. Instead, they define hate speech in light of previous atrocities. Thus, this "pyramid of hate" first begins with prejudice, which then results in hate speech, and then that hate speech escalates into hate crimes and eventually into genocide — something the world has experienced numerous times. Prejudice against the Jews devolved into "Jews are maggots" type hate speech, and then various acts of violence against them broke out, which finally ended in genocide. Thus when statements such as "Auschwitz never happened" are made, they are treated as a denial of the holocaust and punished as such. That is because they know that unless hate speech is dealt with when it is at that level, it will inexorably move towards genocide. Here in Japan, since there are no sanctions placed against those who claim, for instance, that the Nanking Massacre never happened, the process of hate speech continues to escalate. This is a serious problem that I feel we must address.

We also need to remember that in the past, hate speech such as "Kill the Koreans" has actually led to such a massacre here in Japan. That was, of course, the massacre that occurred in the wake of the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923. Thus, there is a huge issue with the way "hate speech" is understood in Japan, which the committee pointed out, saying, "This is not something that is to be protected by law as being free speech; this is violence!" Violence is forbidden, but in a society where it is viewed as being protected by the right of freedom of expression, hate speech cannot be stopped. Nevertheless, article 14 of the Japanese constitution specifically bans discrimination. The recommendation from the UN was for Japan to "establish a comprehensive law banning discrimination." Yet, while Japan's constitution bans discrimination, we have no actual laws against it. This, of course, is the problem. Employment discrimination against workers is banned by article 111 of the ILO Convention, but Japan can't ratify that, since it doesn't have such a comprehensive law banning discrimination. Likewise, when debating the issue of establishing a law forbidding discrimination against people with
handicapping conditions, because there was no comprehensive law banning discrimination, they finally ended up with only a law to "resolve" such discrimination. The same applies to hate speech, and so the only resolution they could come up with was one to "reduce" such speech. Likewise, a law to ban buraku discrimination had to turn into a resolution to reduce or resolve such discrimination. In other words, the most we can accomplish under this law is to aim towards reduction of such issues, because there is no comprehensive law banning discrimination.

What is the problem with not having a law prohibiting discrimination? It is the fact that such a law is what declares to the society at large the necessity of eliminating this social evil. It is through such a law that a system of addressing violations of human rights and restoring the human rights of minorities who have been discriminated against is developed in the first place. Simply having anti-discrimination slogans and the like does not result in a system of relief for victims of discrimination. There is no human rights commission to look into anything. Even if you make a bullying prevention law, there is no human rights commission for a child who is bullied to appeal to. Such children sometimes end up committing suicide because there is no system set up for them to appeal to at the stage when they are being bullied. Likewise, since there is no system through which to seek relief for children who are being abused, there have been repeated instances of death through abuse and suicide.

One particularly tragic incident that can be blamed on the lack of a law prohibiting discrimination occurred in 2016 at the Yamayurien Home for the Disabled in Kanagawa Prefecture, where 19 residents with severe handicaps were murdered. The young man who committed the crime worked at that facility and had repeatedly made statements to the effect of "Kill them through euthanasia." This is a form of hate speech. He was demanding euthanasia for them saying, "Hitler has come down." This reminds us of the "T4 Strategy" of Nazi Germany, where some 200,000 people with handicapping conditions were put to death prior to the Jewish holocaust. The T4 Strategy was one in which doctors prescribed death. The name comes from the street address of the Office of Euthanasia at 4 Tiergarten Street, where these victims were killed.

This incident in Japan should have been stopped at the hate speech level, but because there was no law against such hate speech, there was nothing the administrators could do, other than to request the young man be placed in a mental institution. He wasn't kept there long, however, and when he got out, he came to the facility and committed this crime. Thus, responsibility rests with the government that hasn't made a law against such discrimination, and that is the problem. I think they should be held responsible for this. But the government's response has been to only strengthen the rules concerning involuntary commitment of mental institutions and increase security at institutions for the disabled. The real issue of a comprehensive prohibition of discrimination law wasn't even addressed, and so I think that is where our efforts need to be focused.

**Buraku Discrimination Reduction Act**

I can't finish this presentation without mentioning the "Buraku Discrimination Reduction Act" that was recently passed. I think that it is valid to say that this bill was passed as part of the process of establishing the "Hate Speech Reduction Act." Because hate speech was becoming such an issue, the opposition parties in parliament submitted the "Draft Law Concerning the Promotion of Policies for the Elimination of Discrimination on the Basis of Race, etc." in the upper house. Contrary to expectations that the bill would die there, it went to the Committee on Judicial Affairs where the members debated it, thus raising the possibility of it passing. The ruling Liberal Democratic Party had to act quickly and thus claimed, "The opposition parties' bill is too broad in scope. Eliminating racial discrimination is too broad in scope." Thus, they voted down the bill and instead limited it to hate speech, resulting in the Hate Speech Reduction Act being enacted. Hate speech was defined in the bill as "unjust discriminatory words and actions against legal residents who..."
came from outside of Japan," and the bill is about "reducing" (or "resolving") such discrimination (as opposed to prohibiting it). So, where does that leave people of Ainu, Okinawan and Buraku descent? To clarify that aspect, a supplemental resolution was added to bring to the fore the intent of the ICERD. Thus, because of the government's view that the buraku issue didn't apply to the ICERD, a debate arose as to whether the buraku issue was applicable to the Hate Speech Reduction Act, and so the opposition parties proposed what became the Buraku Discrimination Reduction Act.

The most important aspect of this Buraku Discrimination Reduction Act is that for the first time words to the effect that buraku discrimination does exist and that it should be resolved have been included in a law. Even though there were programs to rectify the gaps in infrastructure and other inequalities between the buraku and surrounding areas, such references as these had never been included in actual legislation. "Buraku discrimination exists." This is the critical point, and so we need to consider why it does still exist. As I mentioned earlier in my lecture, it is because of the family registry system established at the beginning of the Meiji Era. This is what continues to fuel the fires of buraku discrimination, and so the debate as to how to reform this system is where we need to head. Thus, within this flow of history, we need to make the Buraku Discrimination Reduction Act permanent and really engage in the debate about how best to make it a reality.

With respect to the Ainu people, the debate concerning the UN's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is taking place within the context of the Cultural Promotion Law, where it is not only a matter of protecting the language, religion and culture of the indigenous Ainu people, but also land
entitlement, which is a critically important issue for indigenous peoples. The land is their life and so that is at the heart of a people’s right to self-determination and sovereignty. When it comes to actually passing legislation based on the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, however, the Japanese government won’t recognize that and so it becomes a really big problem. With regards to the Ryukyu people of Okinawa and their rights to land and self-determination, the ICERD committee also brought these up for discussion in addition to indigenous rights for the Ainu people.

It is the national government that has brought on discrimination against minorities through their policies and systems, and so we cannot allow that same government to obfuscate the reality of the violations of human rights they have caused while simply saying, "Let’s just get along and not discriminate." In order to realize the dignity of the individual and the universality of human rights, we must expose the roots of the violations of human rights that have occurred against minorities. So, that is the point that I want to end my talk on — namely the importance of the role this process can play in restoring the rights of minorities. Thank you for your attention.

Buraku Liberation Center Activity Report

During this year of 2018, the BLC is planning several events, including a nationwide conference of activists to discuss the future of the Buraku Liberation Movement. That is to take place June 26-28 the city of Izumi in Osaka Prefecture, with about 50 participants expected. The purpose will be to really think through what our future strategy towards buraku liberation should be. Likewise, we are planning our annual Youth Seminar, this time to be held in Kyoto from August 7 to 9. We are also making preparations to perform a new Liberation Play to first be shown at the General Assembly of the Kyodan this fall.

It has been 55 years now since the frame-up conviction based on buraku discrimination that is known as the "Sayama Incident." As it has been our long-held dream to see a retrial be granted, the BLC has instituted its own petition drive to gather signatures to present to the Tokyo High Court, and so on May 11, we presented approximately 4000 such signatures to the court. There is also a new movie concerning this issue of the Sayama Incident and the frame-up of a youth named Ishikawa Kazuo from the buraku community within the city of Sayama. The title of the movie is "Gokutomo," which translates as "Prison Friends," and is about 5 former youth who were clearly framed and convicted on false charges, and who had to spend many years behind bars. The other 4 men have all been cleared of the false charges against them, leaving only Ishikawa Kazuo as the remaining one to yet be granted a retrial to clear his name. We at the BLC want to do all we can to promote this film and have it viewed by as many people as possible.

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