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We Shall Overcome

He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. (Isa. 2:4)

On Dec. 6 of last year, over the protests of many people, the Japanese parliament enacted the State Secrecy Law. Prime Minister Abe may call himself a “progressive peacemaker,” but this action can be seen as part of a plan to make Japan into a nation that can wage war.

Already, the self-defense forces have been beefed up to defend outlying islands and following this new State Secrecy Law is a move to do away with the three principles concerning the export of weapons. This April, plans call for the introduction of a bill to establish the “right to collective self-defense,” which means that Japan would militarily help allied countries. Also, efforts are being made to revise the Japanese Constitution to change Article 9, which forbids military skirmishes with other countries. This will, of course, change Japan into a country that can wage war.

When Doshisha University was founded in Kyoto by Niiijima Jo as a school based in Christian principles, the second president of the university, Yamamoto Kakuma referred to the above verse in his address to the graduating seniors to refer to the Japanese government’s (Continued on page 12)
Thoughts on Japan’s State Secrecy Law

Martha Mensendieck
Doshisha University

Japan’s parliament passed a new State Secrecy Law last December, despite considerable protest from opposition parties and the public. The new law would extend the current powers of the Minister of Defense to keep confidential information “necessary for Japan’s defense.” It extends this power to vague and broad categories of information, including defense, diplomacy, “designated dangerous activities” and prevention of terrorism. The law would also empower cabinet ministries other than the Defense Ministry to designate information as secret. The maximum penalty for disclosure of classified information would be increased to 10 years of imprisonment, from the current 5 years.

The law has drawn criticism from civil rights groups in Japan as well as internationally. In Japan, the bill has been widely opposed by lawyers, politicians, journalists, academics, scientists, as well as film directors and artists concerned about freedom of expression. Those opposed to the bill raise the following points of concern:
1. The bill was hastily and forcibly passed through both houses of parliament.
2. The bill’s vague definition of what constitutes a state secret, potentially giving officials license to block the release of information on issues related to the safety of the country’s nuclear reactors and about US-Japan military bases and facilities across Japan.
3. The bill is reminiscent of pre-war Japan, where access to information and free speech were controlled by the State, leading to World War II.

Many well-known organizations with a commitment to peace and social justice have submitted statements of protest to the Abe Administration. The YWCA, the NCC, (National Christian Council), the Catholic Bishops’ Conference and the Shinshu Otani (Buddhist) Sect are among the religious-based organizations that submitted statements. Other Christian and Buddhist organizations have joined together in an appeal to oppose the bill. The YWCA’s statement concludes: “we strongly protest against the State Secrecy Law that has opened the door for Japan to become a nation which can conduct war again. The use of force is prohibited by the Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution. ... We urge the Japanese government to immediately repeal the Law.”

Internationally, the UN special rapporteur on freedom of expression, Frank La Rue, expressed concern that the bill “not only appears to establish very broad and vague grounds for secrecy but also includes serious threats to whistle-blowers and even journalists reporting on secrets.” Critics of the law say it is a step backward to the days of prewar and wartime Japan, when the state arrested and imprisoned political opponents, using the Peace Preservation Act. Navi Pillay, the UN high commissioner for human rights, also criticized Japan’s government of imposing the legislation with little public debate and without proper safeguards for access of information and freedom of expression, which is guaranteed in Japan’s constitution and international human rights law. Reporters without Borders accused Japan of “making investigative journalism illegal” and raised concerns that information regarding the Fukushima nuclear accident would be classified as state secret. The passage of this law caused Japan to drop ranking in the Reporters Without Borders press freedom index – a drop in 31 places from 2012, to a new low of 53rd out of 179 countries.

Of major concern from a public interest perspective is that the law does not include a provision for an independent administrative body to review the secrecy designations. It does not provide any measure that would allow disclosure of information if the public interest would be harmed by keeping it secret. It also does not include a “public interest defense” that would
ensure that a person who leaks information of high public interest would not be subject to criminal penalties. The law falls far below international standards on national security and the right to information, called the Tshwane Principles.*

The passage of this law is seen as part of the Abe administrations nationalistic agenda, including revision of the Article 9 of the Peace Constitution. The law will make it easier to share classified intelligence with allies like the United States. This is part of Abe’s plan to strengthen Japan’s defense capabilities, which also includes a new national security council, based on the US model. Seen in this light, this new law satisfies the United States, which has pressured Japan to step up defense and intelligence sharing. With already deteriorating relations between Japan and its neighbors, these developments are cause for grave concern. From the perspective of promoting peace in Asia, Abe’s nationalistic agenda increases the risk of military confrontation with its neighbors.

Abe’s aggressive steps are clearly part of his plan toward revision of the constitution and then the establishment of a military force. This is alarming to those of us who believe that Japan’s peace constitution is crucial in preserving peace. Abe’s promotion of revisionist history, claiming that Japan’s wartime atrocities did not happen, is also of great concern. The memory of war – the telling of the truth about what happened during the war and what led to it – have contributed to strong convictions for peace in Japan. Unfortunately, the textbooks that are being chosen by the Education Ministry for use in the schools are shifting toward this revisionist history and toward a more nationalistic education.

It is said that a free and independent media that can speak the truth is the key to democracy and peace. From this perspective as well, we have reason to be very concerned about the Secrecy Law and the path that the present government of Japan is taking. It is another critical time in Japan – a time for those of us working for peace and justice to keep up our work of raising the public consciousness about the perils of this path.

*For more information on the Tshwane Principles, see:
(http://www.right2info.org/exceptions-to-access/national-security/global-principles#section-8)

An Okinawan Perspective on the State Secrecy Law
Usami Mutsuro, associate pastor, Ishikawa Kyodan Church

Okinawa was invaded and occupied by the US military in 1945. Japan concluded the San Francisco Peace Treaty in 1952, and if the Potsdam Declaration accepted by Japan had been followed, the Okinawan occupation by US armed forces would have ended then and Okinawa would have been returned to Japan. However, Okinawa was kept under the administration of the US military.

Without the agreement of the Okinawans, US military bases were forcefully expanded (by bayonets and bulldozers), and the US military has used them as staging bases for making attacks during the wars in Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, Iraq and Afghanistan. Thus, Okinawa has unavoidably been involved in America’s wars. Okinawa was finally returned to Japan in 1972, but in spite of the expectations of the Okinawans, the US military bases have remained stationed in Okinawa permanently. Although Okinawa is only 0.6% of the area of Japan, it is burdened with 74% of the land taken up by U.S. military bases in Japan.

While the Japanese government is made aware of the movements of US armed forces beforehand, that information is completely concealed from citizens. Okinawan people are informed of such things only immediately before their enforcement, so that they will have no time to protest anything and thus always come to grief. For example, in October 2012, 12 MV-22 Ospreys (cargo/troop carriers) that have had a high accident rate were forcibly deployed over the opposition of all the Okinawan people.
Although the Japanese government had already known about the deployment of Ospreys in Okinawa since 1996, the government had concealed this information until one year before the deployment because of the many problems encountered in its development. Prime Minister Abe stated in the National Diet that the Japanese government would give the highest priority to reduction of the burden of Okinawa, and yet he approved of the additional deployment of 12 Ospreys.

In 1996, both the Japanese and US governments agreed to relocate the Futenma Marine Corps Air Station, which Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld had declared “the most dangerous airbase in the world.”

Although the Japanese government took responsibility for finding a relocation site, the only site they could come up with was to relocate it to an offshore site at Henoko in Nago-city, which is still in Okinawa, and they are trying to force its relocation to there.

The US military authorities are rethinking their deployment of the Marines to try to reduce troop levels in Okinawa. With this in mind, a thinktank in the US reports that there is no necessity to relocate the base within Okinawa. This proposed relocation is said to be a reduction in the burden on Okinawa, but what a joke that is. It is ridiculous to say such a thing when a new military port is included that didn’t exist before.
What I Learned From Nelson Mandela
Kimijima Yosaburo

The death of Nelson Mandela on Dec. 5, 2013 was widely reported by the Japanese media. His life was commemorated with tributes to his legacy with headlines such as “He maintained to the end the ideal of ethnic harmony,” and “He laid the foundations for the future of South Africa.” However, even though Mandela visited Japan 3 times after his release from prison, I never saw any reports about the relationship of Japan with the Apartheid government that had kept him locked up in prison for 27 years. After all, the Japanese government and industry had supported the Apartheid government during those years.

Led by the National Christian Council in Japan, Japanese Christians joined together with other citizens to demand the abolition of the Apartheid system. The Buraku Liberation Center of the Kyodan likewise recognized that system as being of the same essence as buraku discrimination, and so they also actively supported the anti-Apartheid movement. Representative slogans of that movement included “Free Nelson Mandela,” “Give up your honorary white status,” “Boycott South African products,” and “Abolish Apartheid!” Yet, in order to have access to South African resources and to sell Japanese products to South Africa, Japan gave tacit approval to Apartheid. Through that, they were given the dubious status of being “honorary whites” and allowed to sit at the table of the whites as sort of second-class whites.

At the anti-Apartheid rallies we held, there was a large picture of Mandel displayed above the stage, where we yelled out our slogans of support. However, the first time I actually saw him on TV was when he was released in 1990. I was really surprised by how different he looked from the picture we had had on display. The portrait picture we had been using showed a young fighter with fire in his eyes, but the man being shown on TV was a gentle looking man of small stature. I thought those 27 years must have really changed him.

After his release from prison, I met him several times at various events he attended here in Japan. President Mandela always spoke passionately about South African renewal. There was great interest in what he was going to do with the perpetrators of Apartheid, whether they would be exiled from the nation or put into prison, etc. However, he did not exile or exclude any of these perpetrators of discrimination, whom he could so easily have shown hatred towards. Instead, he included all of the whites as members of the newly forming nation. What he emphasized was that all ethnic groups would work together in a “rainbow state,” irrespective of whether they had been white oppressors or blacks who had been oppressed. There was to be no discrimination or hatred against anyone based on the color of their skin, their upbringing, their religious faith, etc., and they would all have equal rights based in mutual trust in this effort to build such a nation. While there have certainly been many difficulties in implementing that dream, we can say that there has been significant movement in that direction.

Such reconciliation is not an easy thing, and so Mandela established the “Truth and
Reconciliation Commission,” led by Bishop Desmond Tutu, to begin this process of ethnic reconciliation. The injustices and crimes of the past and the resulting situations the victims faced were individually investigated, with the purpose in mind of revealing the specific injustices perpetrated under the Apartheid regime and bringing the discriminators and those discriminated against face to face in order to make plain the truth. This is the only way to true reconciliation, as it is not a matter of simply letting the past be forgotten, but coming face to face with the facts. I learned from Mandela what the “reconciliation” we often refer to in Christian circles really is.

In contrast to that, Japanese government officials, as well as the media, forget that Japanese were given the benefits of being “honorary whites” by the Apartheid government, and so they avoid the topic of their having been complicit in Mandela’s imprisonment while extolling the achievements of that system. But isn’t the only way for us to accept the hand of reconciliation still being offered to us posthumously by Nelson Mandela to make clear the fact that we were standing with the discriminators as “honorary whites?” We must never forget that in the context of South African history, Japanese were given the status of “honorary whites.”

Today, Japan is in the midst of debate about its view of history vis-à-vis China and Korea. I think that Nelson Mandela is still speaking to us today, saying that the only way to attain reconciliation with our Asian neighbors is for us to make plain the truth of what Japan did in China, Korea and other Asian countries during the war years and facing up to that truth.

Kyodan Sponsors International Conference on the East Japan Disaster
Tim Boyle

The Kyodan sponsored an “International Conference on the East Japan Disaster” in Sendai March 11-14, and so the CWT editorial committee decided it would be good to include an article in this issue, especially from the standpoint of human rights and discrimination. As I did much of the translation of Japanese documents into English prior to the conference and then served as one of the translators during the conference, I was asked to write such an article. I also contributed an article on the conference for the Kyodan Newsletter, which many CWT readers also receive, and so I’ll be writing this one from a different perspective.

The “East Japan Disaster” was a triple catastrophe that began with the “3-11” earthquake, which was soon followed by a giant tsunami that devastated 500 km of coastline. That then set off the chain of events that led to the man-made disaster of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant meltdowns and the prodigious amounts of radiation that dispersed into the environment. The purpose of this international conference was to focus on the effects of that radiation in the areas surrounding the crippled reactors and the efforts of the government of Japan and other nations to continue to rely on nuclear energy into the future.

There were several plenary presentations on radiation-related topics by both Japanese and foreign participants, along with 5 presentations by overseas churches in smaller venues on Thursday afternoon. As there is no way to touch on all of these presentations, I’ll narrow it down to 3 reports as they relate to issues of discrimination. Kataoka Terumi gave
a presentation on the Aizu Radiation Information Center that was immediately followed by a similar presentation by Arakawa Tomoko of Asian Rural Institute. Both of these reports told of the struggles and uncertainties local people faced because of radioactive fallout. The following day, Dr. Dörte Siedentopf, a medical doctor from Germany representing EMS (the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity), gave a report on the effects of radiation, particularly as she had observed in areas affected by the Chernobyl disaster in 1986 and that apply to the Fukushima situation as well.

When it comes to how these testimonies concerning the effects of radioactive fallout on the people caught up in it are related to the general issue of discrimination, the point that I want to make is that other people’s reactions to those affected by radiation often include discriminatory attitudes. When we think of the various kinds of discrimination that exist in our world today, they fall into 3 general categories: racial/ethnic, class and gender. These three categories are epitomized in the well-known “prayer of thanksgiving” Pharisees of Jesus’ day are said to have prayed, “O Lord, I thank you that you did not make me a Gentile, a slave or a woman.” Paul himself may very well have prayed that prayer prior to his encounter with the risen Christ, but as a new creation in Christ, he teaches in his letters how wrong such attitudes are. He encourages followers of Christ to put away all such discriminatory attitudes when he states in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

In both their presentations, Kataoka and Arakawa gave examples of strife and discord even within families caused by the stress and uncertainties associated with the difficult choices people in the areas of significant radioactive fallout faced. To evacuate to safer areas at often great personal cost or to stay behind and try to minimize exposure by staying indoors when possible was a common example of the types of difficult choices people faced. A mother’s desire to protect her children from possible future health issues resulting from radiation exposure was pitted against the needs of the larger family to stick together for job security, harmonious community relations and a variety of other reasons. The anxiety and stress of this unending dilemma has brought on various mental health issues, introduced numerous fractures in human relationships and brought to the surface underlying and dormant prejudices.

The issue of human rights is clearly in view here as the rights people have to a safe environment were violated by the greed and folly of others — in this case, the designers and operators of the nuclear power plant. Likewise, workers being exposed to dangerous levels of radiation has been a serious human rights issue even when nuclear reactors are operating normally, but in the present situation of trying to clean up the mess and prevent an even worse scenario from happening, it is far worse.
The fear of what invisible radiation may be doing introduces another dynamic — that of irrational fears and the discriminatory acts those fears engender. Numerous instances of people from Fukushima being discriminated against due to fear of being contaminated by them have been reported. With few exceptions, such fears are, of course, groundless, but fear of the unknown is a powerful motivation. Such discrimination, in fact, bears a strong resemblance to buraku discrimination, and thus fits into the general category of class discrimination. People of buraku descent were born into their “caste,” as it were, while victims of radiation — whether they were the “hibakusha” of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs or of the reactor meltdowns in Fukushima — become stigmatized in the minds of ignorant people and put into this new caste-like category.

A related phenomenon is that of “fuhyo higai,” literally, “rumor damage.” This refers to people avoiding products or services associated with somewhere viewed as “tainted”— in this case, Fukushima. Of course, if a certain product really is contaminated with radioactivity, then it should be avoided. But farmers and others whose products had not been affected are still shunned simply because of being associated with Fukushima. Interestingly, this word “fuhyo” is made up of the characters for “wind” and “evaluation” — kind of “evaluations carried along by the wind,” i.e. “rumors.” So, how long will this problem continue? To quote an old ballad, “The answer my friend is blowing in the wind”— along with any new radiation releases from Fukushima Daiichi.

The conference closed with the unanimous approval of a resolution calling for both the support of the victims of the nuclear disaster (which, of course, includes an end to acts of discrimination against them) and a commitment by the governments of the world to phase out nuclear power as quickly as possible.

As I think back on the conference, one observation someone mentioned really stuck with me, and that is the ominous parallels between what happened after the 1923 Kanto Earthquake compared with today. Two years after that natural disaster, the government enacted the “Public Security Preservation Law,” which enabled those in power to suppress all dissent. Interestingly, Tokyo had been awarded the 1940 Summer Olympics, but with the pre-war tensions, that had to be cancelled, and the Pacific War began in 1941. Now, we have the great earthquake of 2011 followed by the passage of State Secrecy Law and again Tokyo has been awarded the summer Olympics. While there are also many differences that could be pointed out, it nevertheless is a sobering thought that should motivate us all to do all we can to make sure that this eerie parallel doesn’t continue.

My Encounter With the Issue of Buraku Discrimination

Nobuhiro Kazuko, member of Matsunaga Church

My First Encounter With the Buraku

There were several small buraku communities near my childhood home. I first became aware to the buraku when I was in the 2nd grade, when I recall hearing my grandmother, as well as others in the area, making disparaging remarks against them. One of my classmates was from a buraku, and I often went to play with her. The pathway into the buraku was very narrow—just wide enough for one person to walk along, and the cliff against which the houses were lined up looked like it might collapse at any time. I remember worrying about whether there would be a landslide.

Most all of the households in that region, including mine, were farmers. We raised rice and vegetables, along with the bulrush reeds used to make tatami mats. But those households were different. They made sandals and wove bamboo baskets. I wondered why their jobs were different and also why no one socialized with them. When I went there to play, there was an old couple that really befriended me. They made bamboo baskets and got the bamboo they used from
the thicket next to a close-by temple. I was really impressed by the process of making strips from a bamboo pole and weaving those into baskets, and I never tired of watching it.

There were five Buddhist temples in the area, and I recall how differently my family and others in our neighborhood related to the Buddhist priests when compared to how they treated the people in the buraku. It made me angry, and when I happened to hear over the radio beautiful hymns and talks about Jesus and the Bible, I really felt attracted to Christianity and the value it placed on all people.

"Dowa Education"

I first experienced "Dowa" education in high school. (Ed. note: "Dowa" is the abbreviation of "Doho Yuwa," a euphemism literally meaning "compatriot reconciliation," and refers to education that in the beginning was meant to help bring children from the "Dowa Districts" (i.e. buraku) up to educational standards. It was later expanded to a general education plan to help remove prejudices against people of buraku descent.) My Japanese history teachers was a leader of the Dowa Education promotion team and taught with great enthusiasm about buraku and other forms of discrimination and how such discrimination must not be continued.

Around that time, I decided I wanted to become an elementary school teacher, and so went to university with that intent in mind. I also was exposed to Christianity there.

Becoming an Elementary School Teacher

When I became a teacher in 1975, it was right at the height of the Dowa education movement. I began with great expectations, but the reality was very different. Nothing seemed to be going right for me, and I was doubting whether I was really cut out for this. It was at that time that I thought about attending church, and so I visited the closest church to where I lived, which was Matsunaga Church. I realized my need for Christ and repented of my sin of pride, accepting Christ as my savior. I was baptized that Christmas, and as I turned my life over to Jesus, my teaching job also began to be joyful again.

Dowa education involved learning from the realities of the children's own discriminatory acts and beginning from there to teach the value of each child. I also learned from that my own shortcomings in really understanding the issue of buraku discrimination and my own discriminatory attitudes. I endeavored to aim for a reformation in my own life and to live out an anti-discriminatory life. I really began enjoying my work, as we endeavored to make the workplace a democratic one that valued working together.

My Personal Reformation

As an elementary school teacher involved in Dowa education, my eyes were opened by an incident in which I was guilty of a discriminatory remark. I had been inviting the parents of my students to an anti-discrimination event, and while referring to the issue of buraku discrimination, I used terminology that I had been raised with. Until it was pointed out to me, I hadn't realized how inappropriate the language I used was and how it perpetuated discriminatory attitudes. It showed my own lack of understanding of the buraku discrimination issue.

As I studied the issue more, I realized how unaware I had been of the seriousness of the buraku discrimination issue and that I had been a part of the problem. So, I made the following resolutions: 1) I would endeavor to become a person who understood the pain of those who are discriminated against; 2) I would study the issue so as to have a proper understanding of buraku discrimination; 3) I
would stand with those who receive discrimination and work to end buraku discrimination; and 4) While maintaining a posture of “learning about the reality of buraku discrimination,” I would instill within my students the desire and fortitude to live out the motto, “I will not discriminate and I will not allow others to discriminate.” And, of course, I would make that my own motto as well.

It was with this resolve that I began a new walk in life, and I promised myself that I would make this a goal for my entire life. I began to frequent the Buraku Liberation League Center in Osaka, and I was particularly struck by the wood carving of the crown of thorns done by the youth that was displayed in the entrance. It really spoke to me and encouraged me. My fellow teachers at the school cooperated with my efforts on this issue, and so that was also a great encouragement to me.

Then there was my encounter with the book, “The 12000 Kilometer Caravan of Buraku Liberation.” I was pleasantly surprised when I read through this book of the churches that were involved in buraku liberation. So my dream further expanded to participating in such meetings that would invite such a caravan to come to and encourage my own church to begin having cultural exchanges with people of discriminated-against communities. I endeavored to have my church serve as a host for such a caravan and to become a church where people from a buraku background could feel comfortable and be able to speak freely of their own experiences.

As a first step towards that, I visited the Buraku Liberation Center in August of 1999. I am continuing in that journey towards realizing these goals one step at a time. “For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.” (Phil. 2:13)

Importance of Anti-discrimination Education
Mizuno Matsuo

I work at the Tokyo Buraku Liberation Research Center of the Buraku Liberation League, which is a Public Benefit Foundation. We operate a Japanese website (http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/~mg5s-hsgw/) where we upload information about all of the buraku discrimination incidents that take place in the Tokyo area. Likewise, I am also deeply involved in efforts within the churches to eliminate buraku discrimination from society, and so I encourage my fellow Christians to become familiar with the kinds of incidents involving buraku discrimination that occur around the country and what corrective actions are being taken by subscribing to the “Liberation Newspaper” or reading it in their local library.

In Tokyo, there have been all sorts of incidents related to buraku discrimination, including discriminatory background checks, illegal procurement of family registers, employment discrimination, threats of discrimination, discriminatory land surveys, discriminatory graffiti, instigation of discrimination on the internet, etc. One area that doesn’t come to the surface, however, is marriage discrimination.

There are many such incidents I could focus on, but in my limited space, I’ll just mention one that illustrates the problem well. It took place quite a few years ago, but it is still very relevant today, as the foundations of society haven’t changed much. The culprit was a former student at Keio University, who until his arrest in May 2000 had persisted with his criminal activity for 7 years, beginning in 1993.

During his junior high school days, he had been bullied, and he was motivated by revenge to do what he did. He would use the names of the people he wanted to get back at and send threatening messages purporting to be from them to the Buraku Liberation League offices and to the homes of its staff, saying such things as “If you don’t send me 5 million yen, I’ll publicize your buraku background.”
He thought that by doing this, the Buraku Liberation League would take action against his targets. In order to satisfy his own desires for revenge, he repeatedly used such criminal discrimination without giving it a second thought, and the mental anguish it caused his victims was indeed severe.

The case involved criminal activity based in discrimination against a minority, and so the judge severely chastised the defendant saying, "The thinking behind this criminal activity was extremely immature and dangerous, and so must be severely condemned. ... It involved direct buraku discrimination of a very derogatory and threatening nature, and the method of this abuse was malicious and cowardly. ... The psychological pain this caused the victims and their families was indeed severe, and since it could easily end up promoting further discrimination, its effect on society cannot be overlooked. Thus, the criminal responsibility of the defendant is indeed severe."

This resulted in an 18 month suspended sentence with a 4-year parole period.

Around the world, various laws are being put in effect against discrimination against minorities. In Japan, the issue of "hate speech" [ed. note: taken directly from English and defined in Japanese as "instigating discrimination"] has been discussed in newspapers, but there is also a need for legislation outlawing "hate crimes" [ed. note: also taken directly from English and defined in Japanese as "crimes of discrimination"]. While the punishment is usually rather light, such sentences do have a significant educational effect on the society. In this case, the culprit was young and immature, but it illustrates the underlying attitude in society towards people of buraku descent and the pervasive darkness of a society that forces such stress and poverty on its youth. Nevertheless using buraku discrimination as an outlet for such stress is reprehensible, and so this illustrates the importance of educating our youth to have a sensitivity and interest in the issue of buraku discrimination.

I represent the Kyodan Church as a member of the NCC Committee on Buraku Discrimination Issues, and we have spent the last year preparing seminars on the issue. We have three upcoming events, including a field trip to the Asakusa area of Tokyo to learn about a discriminated-against community there (May 17), a visit to a meat-processing plant to learn about that and to meet the workers (Aug. 18-19) and a field trip to a discriminated-against buraku in the Sumida Ward of Tokyo (Nov. 8). For information, contact the NCC Committee on Buraku Discrimination Issues at nccbdic@gmail.com.

Buraku Liberation Center Report
BLC Director, Kobayashi Akira

First of all, we wish to thank all of you for remembering the Buraku Liberation Center in your prayers. We were encouraged by the many Christmas greetings we received, and the Christmas offerings will greatly help our activities during 2014. The following are some recent and upcoming events we’d like you to be aware of.

Overnight Study Retreat
About twenty people participated in an overnight study retreat February 23-24 that was held at the Omi Heian Church in Shiga Prefecture. The purpose of the retreat was to discuss the issues we face today in light of the Buraku Liberation Center’s Activities Policy that was approved by the Kyodan Executive Council in July 2000 and to dialog together about how to move forward.

Roundtable Conference on Human Rights Education in Seminaries
Representatives from 6 seminaries gathered with BLC staff on March 24-25 at the Himeji Church to discuss the issue of human rights. The twenty participants listened to a presentation by Okubo Yoichi, who heads up the regional office of the Buraku Liberation League in Hyogo Prefecture, concerning discrimination issues
in Hyogo. The conference included a field trip to a Shinto shrine near the city of Shiso, where a Shinto festival is held every autumn in which portable shrines from 4 local villages are included in the festivities. However, the nearby buraku village is not allowed to participate and join in with their portable shrine. The following day, we all went to the BLC office in Osaka (Daito-shi) to have further dialog and discuss future plans.

Upcoming Events:

**July 13th Day of Prayer**
Every year on the second Sunday of July, Kyodan churches across the nation hold a “Day of Prayer for Buraku Liberation.” The BLC prepares a resource pamphlet to aid in preparing the worship services in the churches.

**National Meeting for Mutual Exchange Among Buraku Liberation Activists**
This year, we will be meeting in Aizu, Fukushima from June 9 to 11.

**Youth Seminar**
Our annual youth seminar will be held August 26-29.

**Liberation Play**
The first showing of the new Liberation Play is scheduled on Aug. 17, and other venues are being planned, including one in Osaka in September.

**Website**
Our website is continually being upgraded, but still is only in Japanese.

(continued from page 1)

Aims of militarily intervening in China with the goal of expanding their rule to the Korean Peninsula. “I only wish that the powers to be would take this verse to heart and become people who will not learn war anymore.”

However, Yamamoto’s appeal was ignored and shortly thereafter, Japan embarked on its first war with China, which led to its efforts to colonize much of Asia, which in turn led to conflict with western powers and then to WWII. Huge numbers of both Japanese as well as other Asians were sacrificed in war effort, and so the mistakes our country made then must not be allowed to happen again.

As the tensions with China and Korea intensify because of disputes on the territorial rights of a few small islands, many Japanese are giving their support to the Abe government based on their expectations of “Abenomics” to revive the economy, while ignoring the huge dangers inherent in his drive to transform Japan into a nation that can wage war. It is in this situation, then, that Japanese Christians are called upon to pray and work for the preservation of the Japanese Constitution so that this country will be one that “will not learn war anymore.”

Rev. Sato Shigeyoshi, Pastor of Koshien Church

Editor’s Note: Many of our readers also receive the Kyodan Newsletter, and since the conventions each has used with respect to the order of Japanese names have been different, there hasn’t been consistency between the two publications. In order to avoid confusion, CWT has decided to switch over to the KNL policy, which is to write Japanese names in the order they are normally written in Japan (along with most of the rest of Asia), and that is to have the family name first followed by the personal name.

Crowned With Thorns Editorial Committee
BLC Director Kobayashi Akira, BLC management committee chairperson Higashitani Makoto, Missionary Tim Boyle, Rev. Sato Shigeyoshi, Rev. Oguri Ken, Rev. Honma Mayumi.
We appreciate your comments and suggestions concerning this newsletter and how to make improvements. Donations in either Japanese yen or US dollars are greatly appreciated and can be made by personal check.