

# **The Role of the Buraku Liberation League in Building a World without Discrimination**

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## **Introduction**

Buraku issues, alongside Dalit discrimination that exists in India and other parts of South Asia and similar forms of discrimination that exist in countries throughout Africa, have now been taken up as an important theme by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Human Rights Sub-Commission.<sup>1</sup>

When we look at this historical process and the progress made from it, we can see how important a role Japan's Buraku Liberation League and the International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination (IMADR) have played.

This paper provides a concise description of this historical process, present accomplishments, and current issues.

## **International Solidarity Work in the time of the Suiheisha**

The Suiheisha was founded on March 3, 1922 in the Okazaki Public Hall in Kyoto, and had an eye for international solidarity from the outset. This perspective is symbolized by the fact that thinking based on an advanced humanism of the world at that time is reflected in the declaration adopted at the founding ceremony. For example, the Suiheisha declaration includes the idea basic to human rights, namely, that humans should not be the object of compassion or pity but instead should be the object of respect (cf. addendum 1). This same idea is included in lines uttered by the protagonist of Maxim Gorky's representative work "The Lower Depths."

The active efforts of the Suiheisha progressed from that point, and include two particularly important developments in the realm of international solidarity. The first was establishing a network with the Hyonpyonsa, the liberation movement of the Korean discriminated-against group, the Paekchong. The Hyonpyonsa was founded in April of 1923, and following its founding activists from both groups participated in each others' meetings, maintained contact with each other, and visited each other to see what work they were doing. The second development was the August 1933 adoption of a letter of protest against the German Nazi's oppression of the Jews (picture 1).

## **Post-War Activities, Under the Leadership of Former Chairman Matsumoto Jiichiro**

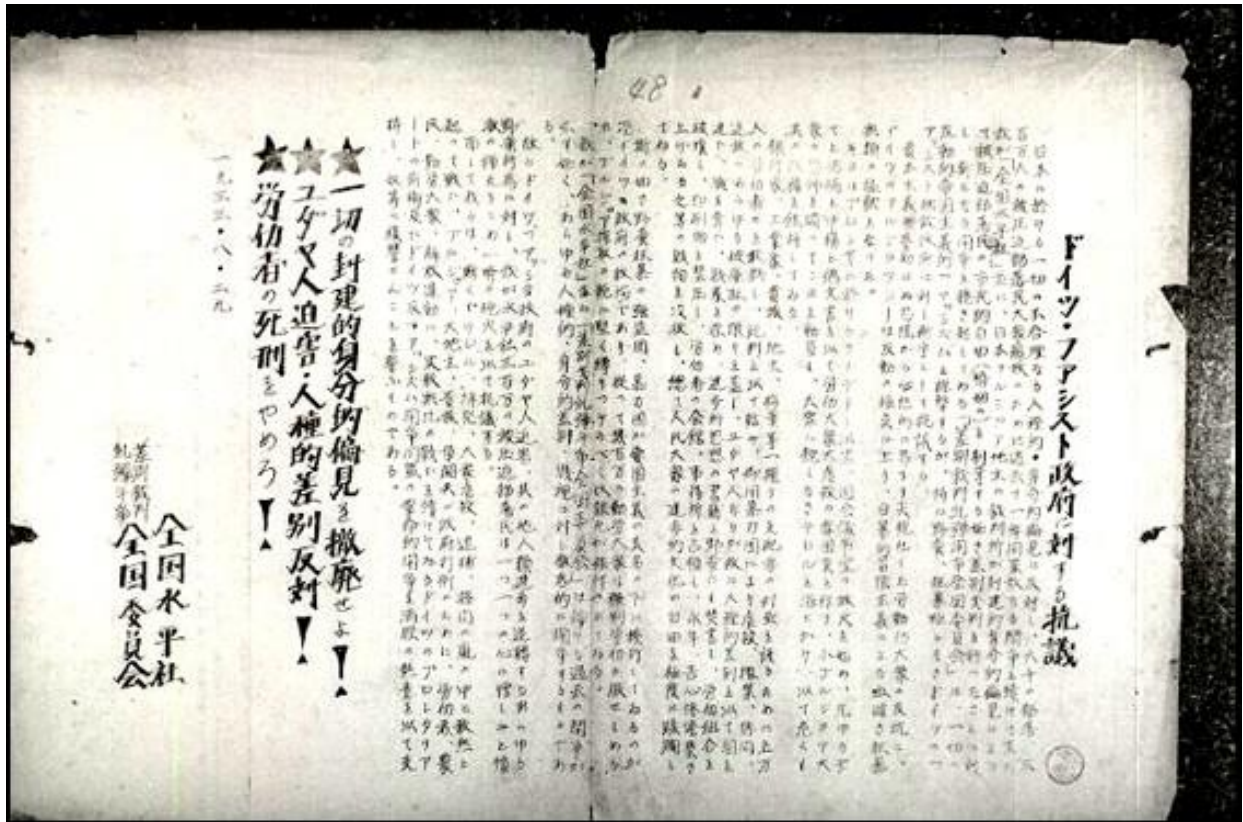
In February of 1946, the Buraku liberation movement was re-established as the National Committee for Buraku Liberation. Afterward, in August of 1955, it changed its name to the Buraku Liberation League and has continued its active efforts until today.

When we examine the international solidarity efforts of the post-war Buraku liberation movement, we can divide them into three stages. The first consisted of efforts at international solidarity primarily under Former Chairman Matsumoto Jiichiro (1887-1966). Former Chairman Matsumoto Jiichiro took "inviolability" as his watchword, and gave his entire life to the Buraku liberation movement; he also contributed to developing friendly relations with China and worked as director of the Japan-China Friendship Association. Additionally, he visited India in April of 1955 and started solidarity work with people from castes facing discrimination (picture 2). Furthermore, in March of 1956 he attended the

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<sup>1</sup> Originally founded in 1947 under the UN Commission on Human Rights as the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. In 1999 its name was changed to the UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights. Comprised of 26 experts, the sub-commission conducts surveys and research of a variety of human rights issues and issues reports and recommendations. They stopped their activities in August of 2006, and their functions were taken up in 2007 by the Human Rights Consultative Committee (18 members), formed under the Human Rights Council.

Meeting of International League against Racism and the Ostracization of Jews in Paris, France, and wrote a letter of support.



(Picture 1 Statement against the oppression of the Jews)



(Picture 2 Matsumoto Jiichiro in India)

### **The Late 70s On: Working alongside UN Human Rights Activities**

The second stage of post-war international solidarity began in the late 70s when the Buraku Liberation League and the Buraku Liberation Research Institute (name at that time) became involved in the UN's human rights activities and in anti-discrimination movements in other countries. After 1976, both organizations supported the ratification of the two human rights conventions before the UN, and in December of 1977 held symposia in Tokyo and Osaka to which they invited Marc Schreiber, the former director of the division of human rights (picture 3). Japan ratified the conventions in June of 1979.

The two organizations then turned to pushing forth the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), and in December of 1995 Japan was added to the convention.

During this time, they worked to deepen their connections with people fighting against discrimination in the United States, Europe, India, and South Africa and held a variety of symposia, including the International Symposium on Human Rights in December of 1980, the First International Meeting against Discrimination in December 1982, the "Assembly for the Establishment of Peace and the End of Apartheid" in April 1987, and the Second International Meeting against Discrimination in December 1988 (cf. addendum 2).





(Picture 3 Marc Schreiber at a meeting for the ratification of the UN human rights conventions at the Japanese Bar Association)

### **Formation of the International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination (January 1988) and following International Solidarity**

On January 25<sup>th</sup>, 1988, The International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination (IMADR) was formed with the intent of building an international Suiheisha (leveller's association), based upon and continuing the work that had been done with anti-discrimination movements around the world and with the UN human rights mechanisms since the late 1970s, and their headquarters was established in Tokyo in the Matsumoto Jiichiro Memorial Building. The following years saw the third stage in post-war international solidarity.

After its inception, IMADR was actively engaged in a variety of activities including the struggle to end apartheid in South Africa, and in March 1993 became an international human rights NGO with consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

Furthermore, since October 1991 IMADR has maintained an office in Geneva, Switzerland, where the UN's human rights activities are based, and has continued its active efforts in eliminating forms of discrimination based on social stratification such as Japan's Buraku discrimination, and in promoting the human rights of minorities and indigenous peoples.<sup>2</sup>

### **ICERD and the Elimination of “Descent-Based Discrimination”**

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<sup>2</sup> The following people have all been instrumental in the success of IMADR: its first Secretary General and former Chairman of the Buraku Liberation League Uesugi Saichiro (1919-1996), its second Secretary General, the Belgian lawyer Miriam Schreiber (1914-2004), the Under Secretary General and professor at William Paterson University, U.S., Lim Summan (1927-2006), and the permanent representative to the UN for 11 years Atsuko Tanaka-Fox. We honor their contributions and offer them our respect.

All countries that have entered into the human rights conventions of the UN such as the ICERD, the ICCPR, and the ICESCR, are required to submit periodic reports on the domestic status of these issues to the UN.<sup>3</sup> Each of the submitted reports is reviewed by members of the governing committee, which issues opinions in the form of recommendations.

The recommendations issued by the governing committees of these conventions upon consideration of the report submitted by the Japanese government on the status of the issues falling under the purview of the HR conventions and the ICERD call for the quick resolution of Buraku issues.

For example, in March of 2001 the CERD, upon consideration of the first and second reports from the Japanese government, stated in their final opinion that Japanese Buraku discrimination falls under the purview of the first article of the ICERD and recommended measures for protection from discrimination as well as the complete preservation of all civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of the Buraku people.<sup>4</sup>

In its consideration of the reports from the Indian government (September 1999, March 2007), the Nepalese government (August 2000), and the Bangladeshi government (March 2001), the CERD indicated that discrimination arising from a caste system was “descent-based discrimination” and called for its elimination.

Despite the above recommendations of the CERD, the Japanese and Indian governments continue to refuse to recognize Buraku discrimination and caste based discrimination as “discrimination based on descent” as stipulated in article one of the convention, and in August of 2002 the CERD held a thematic discussion of “descent” as stipulated by article one of the convention and adopted “General Recommendation 29.” This recommendation strongly reaffirmed “that discrimination based on ‘descent’ includes discrimination against members of communities based on forms of social stratification such as caste and analogous systems of inherited status which nullify or impair their equal enjoyment of human rights” and in its 48 articles recommended measures for the elimination of this discrimination.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Human Rights Sub-Commission and “Discrimination Based on Work and Descent”**

Representatives from the Buraku Liberation League and the Buraku Liberation Research Institute (name at that time) have been actively participating in UN meetings related to human rights, in particular the meetings of the HR Sub-Commission, since the early 1980s. In 1983 to the Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery and in the following year 1984 to the HR Sub-Commission, these representatives presented the present situation of Buraku discrimination and requested that the UN being to take interest in these issues. A similar movement happened in the later half of the 1990s, led by organizations working for the elimination of discrimination against particular castes of India (who call themselves the Dalit, or ‘the oppressed ones’).

Hearing such requests from all sides, the HR Sub-Commission adopted a “Resolution on Discrimination Based on Work and Descent” in August of 2000, and also resolved to appoint Special Rapporteurs to investigate this form of discrimination and to draft proposals on it.<sup>6</sup>

Since this decision, the Special Rapporteurs on the elimination of “Discrimination Based on Work and Descent” have undertaken the following list of activities:

- August 2001 Report by Councilor Gooneskere (on discrimination faced by the Dalit of South Asia and that faced by the Buraku people of Japan)
- August 2003 Report by Councilors Eide and Yokota (adding to the above report a description of similar forms of discrimination in Africa)

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<sup>3</sup> The UN human rights conventions include the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Convention on Economic, Cultural, and Social Rights (ICESCR). Each maintains a monitoring committee.

<sup>4</sup> For the full text, please refer to “*Nihon kara Sekai he no Hasshin ‘Shokugyou to Sekei ni Motodzuku Sabetsu’*,” 2005. Buraku Liberation and Human Rights Institute, ed.

<sup>5</sup> For the full text, please refer to “*Nihon kara Sekai he no Hasshin ‘Shokugyou to Sekei ni Motodzuku Sabetsu’*,” 2005. Buraku Liberation and Human Rights Institute, ed.

<sup>6</sup> For the full text, please refer to “*Nihon kara Sekai he no Hasshin ‘Shokugyou to Sekei ni Motodzuku Sabetsu’*,” 2005. Buraku Liberation and Human Rights Institute, ed.

- July 2004                      Supplementary report by Councilors Eide and Yokota (on similar forms of discrimination in diaspora communities)  
The HR Sub-Commission adopted a resolution to appoint two Special Rapporteurs, Yokota and Chon, to establish and prepare a report on guidelines and principles for the elimination of “Discrimination Based on Work and Descent”
- July 2005                      Yokota and Chon submit a preliminary “Guidelines and Principles” for the elimination of “Discrimination Based on Work and Descent”

Since then, as part of the restructuring of the UN, the UN Human Rights Commission closed the curtain on approximately 60 years of activity in March of 2006, and in June of 2007 this work was taken up by the new Human Rights Council. Along with this restructuring, in 2007 the HR Sub-Commission was reformed as the UN Human Rights Consultative Committee in August 2008 held their first meeting. As a result, the final version of the “Guidelines and Principles” to be submitted in November of 2007 unfortunately faces an uncertain future.

### **Suggestions Regarding Multiple Discriminations**

In the CERD’s concluding observations upon the March 2001 consideration of report from the Japanese government (introduced above), they specifically indicate “The Committee recommends that the next State party report contain socio-economic data disaggregated by gender and national and ethnic group and information on measures taken to prevent gender-related racial discrimination, including sexual exploitation and violence” (paragraph 22).

Additionally, in the final opinion of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women upon consideration of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> reports from Japan, in July 2003, they provide the following recommendation: “The Committee requests the State party to provide, in its next report, comprehensive information, including disaggregated data, on the situation of minority women in Japan, especially with regard to their educational, employment and health status and exposure to violence” (paragraph 30).

As these statements indicate, the importance of paying special attention to the situation of women who also face “discrimination based on descent” or “discrimination based on work and descent,” and working towards the elimination of their discrimination has become a strongly noted issue in recent years.

### **Suggestions of the UN Special Rapporteur on Racism in his report on his formal visit to Japan**

In July of 2005 the UN Human Rights Commission’s Special Rapporteur on Modern Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Forms of Intolerance, Doudou Diene, made a formal visit to Japan. His report (below referred as the “Diene Report”) was submitted to the Human Rights Council in September 2006, and makes the following important points:<sup>7</sup>

- Minority groups such as the Buraku people are marginalized when it comes to access to education, employment, health, and housing.
- Minority groups such as the Buraku people are rendered invisible in the government.
- The country of Japan must demonstrate the will to acknowledge and combat the discrimination that the Buraku people and other minority groups in Japan face.
- Japan should carry out surveys of affected populations.
- Japan should enact legislation prohibiting discrimination.
- Japan should establish a domestic human rights body for human rights and equality.
- Japan should establish a branch of government devoted to the resolution of discrimination, including Buraku discrimination.
- Media in Japan should broadcast more shows about minority issues.
- The rights of minority women should be strengthened.

### **Present Accomplishments**

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<sup>7</sup> The Diene Report can be found online at <http://www.imadr.org/japan/diene/index.html>

The international solidarity work on a UN human right level that has been done to resolve Buraku issues since the late 1970s has resulted in the following accomplishments:

- Buraku issues in Japan have become a topic of discussion within the recommendations issued by the monitoring committees of the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the CERD, and the CEDAW in response to reports submitted by the Japanese government
- Buraku issues in Japan have drawn the attention of Special Rapporteurs under both the Human Rights Commission and Sub-Commission and the rapporteurs have issued suggestions for the resolution of these issues
- Buraku issues in Japan have become a topic of international interest, interpreted, alongside Dalit discrimination in India and other parts of South Asia, similar forms of discrimination in several countries across Africa, and similar forms of discrimination in diaspora communities, as “Discrimination Based on Descent” under the CERD and as “Discrimination Based on Work and Descent” under the Human Rights Sub-Commission
- Within Japan as well, the resolution of Buraku issues has become more widely acknowledged as an “international duty.” (For example, the Council for Community Improvement issued a statement in May 1996 stating, “Efforts to resolve human rights issues such as Douwa issues even a day quicker has become an international duty.”)
- IMADR and the IDSN have been formed as bodies that will maintain the UN’s interest in forms of “Discrimination Based on Descent” and “Discrimination Based on Work and Descent” such as Buraku issues.<sup>8</sup>

## **Current Topics**

As I stated above “Discrimination Based on Descent” and “Discrimination Based on Work and Descent” such as Buraku issues have become topics within the UN. However, in order to eliminate these forms of discrimination and work toward building world peace, there are still many issues that need to be dealt with both within Japan and on a UN level. The following are such current topics:

- We need to have the Japanese government recognize Buraku issues as falling within the purview of “Descent” as stipulated by the ICERD, and have them follow the recommendations of the CERD and the “General Recommendation 29 on Descent.”
- We need to work so that the efforts at eliminating “Discrimination Based on Work and Descent” carried out under the HR Sub-Commission are continued within the new framework of the Human Rights Council.
- We need to examine the possibility of adopting a convention or declaration at the UN level aiming at the elimination of “Discrimination Based on Descent” and “Discrimination Based on Work and Descent.”
- To this end, we need to deepen research on and surveys of these types of discrimination and identify where in the world and in what form they exist.
- We need to strengthen IMADR and the IDSN.

## **In Conclusion**

In this age in which everything is undergoing globalization, any resolution of “Discrimination Based on Descent” and “Discrimination Based on Work and Descent” cannot be realized without an international perspective or a perspective of international solidarity.

In October of 1998, the First World Conference on the Elimination of Caste Discrimination was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. In his introductory remarks, M. G. Pandigtang, member of the House of Representatives Malaysia, said, “There are over 30 million Dalit people suffering from discrimination

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<sup>8</sup> The International Dalit Solidarity Network was founded in March 2000 in London, England with the aim of eliminating Dalit discrimination from the world. The National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR), IMADR, and the Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO) of Nepal are all members.

world-wide. Discrimination against the Dalit is the largest human rights issue since the eradication of apartheid.” This assessment could not be more correct.<sup>9</sup>

As the elimination of “Discrimination Based on Descent” and “Discrimination Based on Work and Descent” have become topics of increased international and UN interest, the international expectations on Japan’s Buraku liberation league, with its 85 year history since the inception of the Suiheisha, to further the work toward this goal have also become large.

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<sup>9</sup> cf. “Participating in the First World Conference on the Elimination of Caste Discrimination” in *Human Rights* no. 129, December 1998. Tomonaga Kenzo.



## Addendum 1

### Suiheisha Declaration

Declaration

Tokushu Burakumin throughout the country: Unite!

Long-suffering brothers! Over the past half-century, the movements on our behalf by so many people and in such varied ways have yielded no appreciable results. This failure is the punishment we have incurred for permitting ourselves as well as others to debase our own human dignity. Previous movements, though seemingly motivated by compassion, actually corrupted many of our brothers. Thus, it is imperative that we now organize a new collective movement to emancipate ourselves by promoting respect for human dignity.

Brothers! Our ancestors pursued and practiced freedom and equality. They were the victims of base, contemptible class policies and they were the manly martyrs of industry. As a reward for skinning animals, they were stripped of their own living flesh; in return for tearing out the hearts of animals, their own warm human hearts were ripped apart. They were even spat upon with ridicule. Yet, all through these cursed nightmares, their human pride ran deep in their blood. Now, the time has come when we human beings, pulsing with this blood, are soon to regain our divine dignity.<sup>5</sup> The time has come for the victims to throw off their stigma. The time has come for the blessing of the martyrs' crown of thorns.

The time has come when we can be proud of being Eta.

We must never again shame our ancestors and profane humanity through servile words and cowardly deeds. We, who know just how cold human society can be, who know what it is to be pitied, do fervently seek and adore the warmth and light of human life from deep within our hearts.

Thus is the Suiheisha born.

Let there be warmth in human society, let there be light in all human beings.

March 3, 1922 The Suiheisha

## Addendum 2

### Timeline of International Solidarity

1977 December	Meeting inviting former UN director of the division of human rights, Marc Schreiber
1980 December 4-12	International Symposium on Human Rights (Osaka, Tokyo)
1982 December 2-8	The First International Meeting against Discrimination (Osaka, Fukuoka, Tokyo)
1983 August 1-12	Participated in The Second UN International Forum to Combat Racial Discrimination (Human Rights Sub-Commission)
December 6-10	Assembly for the 35 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Tokyo, Fukuoka, Hiroshima, Osaka)
1984 Aug 9 – Sept 12	The Fourth World Conference of Religions for Peace, UN Human Rights Sub-Commission (Nairobi)
October 11-15	Symposium on “Employment and Equality – Human Rights” (Tokyo, Osaka)
December 5-10	Assembly for the Swift Ratification of ICEDAW and ICERD (Sapporo, Tokyo, Osaka)
1985 December 5-10	Assembly for the 37 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Tokyo, Fukuoka, Hiroshima, Osaka)
1986 August 7	Assembly for Desmond Tutu
December 8-12	Assembly for the 38 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Tokyo, Osaka)
1987 April 21	Assembly for the Establishment of Peace and the End of Apartheid
Aug 22 – Sept 11	Dispatch to Europe for NGO Exchange
October 13-27	Dispatch to Europe and the U.S. for NGO Exchange
December 7-10	Assembly for the 39 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Tokyo, Hiroshima, Osaka)
1988 January 24	Preparatory meeting for the foundation of the International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination (IMADR)
January 25	General meeting for the foundation of the International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination (IMADR)
December	Second International Meeting against Discrimination

(from “Buraku Liberation and International Solidarity”  
Dec 1988, Headquarters of the Buraku Liberation League)