

UNAFEI 173rd International Seminar

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On behalf of my fellow participants from Japan and overseas, the participants of the 173rd International Programme of UNAFEI, I consider it a great honour and privilege to stand here today, this evening, amongst you, especially the day before our departure, to express our sincere gratitude to those who very well deserve it.

For most of us, this was the first time in Japan though I have been here twice before. But I have to tell you that this is the first time I have been fully exposed to a hundred percent Japanese atmosphere. More often than not, we have heard, read or as of the present era 'googled' about Japan. It is common that the Japanese bear an international reputation as being punctual, methodical, hard-working and polite, some characteristics we strive to achieve at times back home. Moreover, Japan is also renowned for its safety, beauty, rich nature, unique architecture and, above all, their hospitality. We were indeed fortunate to experience all these good qualities during our stay here. I will elaborate them later.

From the day we arrived in Japan, be it at Haneda or Narita Airports, we were treated with much kindness, to which we are very grateful firstly to JICA and then to UNAFEI. As is the routine, most of us here spent the initial day or two at the JICA Tokyo International Centre. All staff therein were so caring and were constantly trying their level best to assist us and manage the activities conducted at the JICA Tokyo International Centre to facilitate our smooth integration to the next phase of the

programme. In this regard, let me express our sincere gratitude to Mr. Ukai, and the two beautiful and elegant Japanese 'Mother hens', Ms. Hisa and Ms. Aratani. From the time we set foot on Japanese soil until we board the planes tomorrow and the day after, I am certain that we kept them really occupied, at times burdening them with all our problems and at times on a daily basis. They were our ombudsmen, or should I call them 'ombudswomen'? Needless to say, they had some kind of solution to each and every problem we handed them. May I wish that you continue to be JICA Coordinators for many more years!

The orientation programme at the JICA Tokyo International Centre was an eye opener for all of us and helped us actually confirm what we have either heard, learned or read about Japan. When I learned that traditionally the Japanese wife is entitled to the monthly pay check of her spouse, oh, I wanted to be Japanese!

Nothing could compare to the warm welcome we received at the UNAFEI premises upon our arrival. I still don't know whether it is a typical Japanese greeting or no, but they were all assembled at the main entrance, waving their hands, full of smiles, and even carried our bags! At that moment I realized '*Watashi-wa Nihon ga dai suki desu*' (I love Japan). Later this practice became a common occurrence whenever we either left or reached the UNAFEI premises, and the practice gave us much joy. I am sure we will experience the same salutation, but of course, this time we would all depart with a very heavy heart. Because we have created deep rooted bonds that run across 17 countries including Japan. By now we have found friends that will last a lifetime and more. We will definitely miss UNAFEI, JICA and Japan, but each of you will always have a place in my heart.

An interesting tailor-made programme awaited us with the main theme revolving round 'Violence against women and children: how to prevent reoffending', an international concern, if not properly addressed, will cost countries, millions of dollars a year. The learning was not limited to paper, since we encountered ample travelling by

way of site visits that exposed us to various aspects of the criminal justice system here in Japan. At times, it was difficult to comprehend whether it was enjoying the learning or learning to enjoy. Imagine our surprise when we heard that it was a KING at UNAFEI who did all this – KING Taku, or Prof. Takuya Furuhashi, our programme officer. No wonder we received royal treatment wherever we went! Please accept our heartiest congratulations for a job well done, Prof. Furuhashi! We are ever so grateful. You and your team here need a good round of applause from us.

The cross section of the participants, including judges, prosecutors, correctional and probation officers, the visiting experts from overseas as well the Japanese experts took us through a plethora of lectures, workshops, practical exercises which were topic oriented. More often than not, the day was not enough to ask questions in clarification. Their input was so interesting that we were totally immersed with the issues pertaining to violence against women and children, offender rehabilitation and prevention of recidivism. The best experience was our first-hand exposure to the Japanese criminal justice system and their best practices. Some of us were so fortunate that we even had the privilege of speaking to two judges!! Many thanks to Jun-san, our group's *saibankan* (judge) for organizing this visit.

The study tour to Hiroshima, Osaka and Kyoto was the highlight of the programme. So was the Yamanashi prefectural police visit. I was slightly luckier than my fellow participants to have made a visit to Sapporo at the courtesy of the Asia Crime Prevention Foundation (ACPF). I fulfilled my dream of visiting the Royce chocolate factory at Chitose airport on this visit. All the teams that made their respective visits were fascinated by the Japanese criminal justice system as well as their hospitality. Our mouths ached, ears full, from the chit chat for days to follow. Some of us made it to the news, to the papers or magazines that carried our photos. A heartfelt 'thank you to ACPF' from all of us for the memorable two days, especially to Yoshida san for his superb and relentless coordinating efforts to make us comfortable and at ease, all the time.

The most exciting was the visit to the Hiroshima Memorial Centre. As a child and a student, I had read so much about Hiroshima, and I was spell bound when I saw the reality. Coming from a country where the Japanese bombed in the 1940s, I still could not imagine the devastation experienced by Hiroshima itself. The marked difference of the visitors was apparent—they were full of laughter upon entry and the faces so sad and dead silence prevailed upon exit. So much was the impact of the audio-visual displays. Imagine what it could have been to be really in it. So, I did what I always wanted to do all my life, pray for the peace of those whose lives were sacrificed for no fault of their own. It also teaches us the devastating effect of atomic or nuclear bombs, or weapons of mass destruction and why the world should canvass 'peace' instead of war. Why violence of any form should not be tolerated any further and canvass for and practice 'prosperity without crime'.

Now again to the good side of things. I enjoyed leaning Japanese as a language. I even managed to introduce myself in Japanese. And therefore '*Minasan-ni aete ureshiku omoimasu*' (pleased to meet you).

But none of these wonderful experiences would have been possible if not for JICA, both here and in our respective countries. To JICA, '*Konotabiwa omaneki itadaki arigatou gozaimashita*'. I wish that JICA would continue its missions for generations to come. In addition to JICA, ACPF sponsored us on many occasions to cushion our stay here and wherever we went so that we never faced any inconvenience at all. I will fail in my duty today if I do not mention the extent of care and concern demonstrated by the officers of the ACPF Sapporo branch to look after the two of us, Masan and myself. However, when the pilot announced that we cannot land due to bad weather, which I witnessed from my window, and indeed it was, with butterflies in the stomach, I woke Mr. Ken and Ma up and told them to pray!

Despite the bad weather, the ACPF Sapporo branch cared so much for us that from the time we departed UNAFEI they were in contact with Mr. Ken, our companion

through the tour, I think he is not here today, inquiring about us and our food preferences. So much so, we ended up having a 'Chinese' dinner in Japan after the party! Catching the 'Missing the spices' I would call it later. Let me wish that ACPF would continue to live their mission "Prosperity without Crime" and spread it like a virus in its true sense to minimize crimes all over the world. Once again thank you ACPF for your kind generosity.

We would never forget all the staff members here at UNAFEI, be it at the cafeteria, security or cleaning, whoever facilitated our daily survival here. Our heartfelt thanks go to the secretariat staff headed by Mr. Fujita. There are nine to be exact, Mr. Koseki, Mr. Onda, Mr. Saito, Ms. Matsuda (the lady with the camera), Mr. Kondo, Ms. Iinuma (Hasan), Ms. Hisayo and finally the librarian, Ms. Naoko. Thank you very much indeed!

Now let me turn to the UNAFEI Professors. Back home, when we were communicating with UNAFEI via email, we visualized these 'professors' in comparison to that of our countries. Oh, they ruined our imagination at the welcome stage and disappointed us on the very first day itself! Do you know why? They are a set of very young—compared to me that is—and energetic handsome men and beautiful women as opposed to the professors who are, for sure 60 plus back home! Even though one cannot summarize their efforts into words, because words are inadequate, however eloquent one is. *Arigatou gozaimashita* to the team of professors here at UNAFEI! Our gratitude to you runs so very deep. I regret that individual names cannot be mentioned, as by now you are waiting for me to finish, but I should mention one person that lingered with us always whenever she was around, the Deputy Director Ms. Ishihara, who was always there with us enjoying the nights at lounge B! Thank you, madam.

The unique feature we experienced at UNAFEI was that almost all their professors and academic staff, as well as Director Seto and Deputy Director Ishihara sitting through our sessions every day, the whole day. That was amazing! I don't know who ran their

show, unless it was on 'auto pilot'. They were so attuned to the sessions, providing us the necessary guidance and, at times, with their prompt interventions!

Now let me turn to our Japanese friends. To all the five 'sans', Jun, Ayumi, Aki, Yayoi and Shin. You were wonderful! To start with, Jun-san was always at our service. We were so privileged to have the 'Saibankan' waiting for us because, upon our return, at least for the Japanese participants, be prepared to await him next! Ayumi the ever-energetic prosecutor, she always had things that are Japanese to eat, anytime, anywhere. Aki, the artist, who was always so very helpful. Yayoi the 'chocolate lady' who I bumped into at the gym whenever I went there. She was there every day! Shin saw that his conversations with us was minimal—the language was the barrier, oh, but you are a kind one, Shin san.

Day after day, on weekdays and weekends, from morning until night, from breakfast to dinner, on the trains and buses, we shared precious moments and had fun. At one point we accidentally found out that the official camera could do 'selfies'! Being able to see a smile in the cafeteria or hear *ohayou gozaimasu, konnchiwa, konbanwa*, or a burst of laughter emanating from somewhere in the building was heartwarming. We all giggled during the Japanese classes and moved our bodies the best way we could in Lounge B, our party point. Yes, we did it all together. And, yes, all these memories are unforgettable.

Unknown to Taku san, Ayumi and Aki had a mission especially assigned by me, that is to teach me Japanese. So I hope my Japanese teachers are content with their student by today. Please let us put our hands together for the Japanese participants of the 173rd UNAFEI Programme as they were our lifelines here in Japan, always, I repeat, always assisting us with whatever we wanted to do or wherever we wanted to go. They facilitated our smooth transition to the Japanese culture and mannerisms. *Hontou-ni arigatou gozaimashita*. I sincerely hope the connections we made will last long.

Outstanding hospitality was extended to us by the Volunteer Probation Officers during our visits to their respective homes. They showered us not only with food, but also gifts. Ms. Iizuka and her VPO friends entertained us with music and even provided us with material big enough to enable three groups to sit and watch the fireworks at Chofu. I pity those who missed it. We really appreciate the services rendered by the Volunteer Probation Officers here in Japan, to encourage and engage in rehabilitation and to promote social integration of their respective assignments.

Finally, let me also thank each and every one of the fellow participants who came here with me, from all over the world, for their understanding, cooperation and the connectivity we have by now established. If not for you, it would have been very boring indeed. Thank you very much for your contributions in any manner whatsoever, to make these five weeks interesting and enjoyable.

To all of you once again, I thank you very much for your patience. I hope I did not bore you too much with all the details. Finally, let me wish each and every one of you a safe journey home tonight. To the rest of you, have a safe flight home, reunite with your families, but keep us in your hearts!

Saikou-no omoide-wo arigatou gozaimashita.