

Mr. Ban Ki-moon
Secretary-General
United Nations
New York, NY 10017
USA

Dear Mr. Secretary-General,

I am writing this to pay a tribute to your challenge to promote world peace and the human rights of people and ask you to promote the human rights of older persons.

We, the members of the Japan NGO Network on Aging which was established as one of the UN non-governmental organizations in 1998, are working everyday to promote and protect the human rights of older persons (Reference no. 1).

Especially, we are making efforts to exchange and expand understanding and relationships with other Asian countries such as China, Korea and Mongolia. We also sent a delegate of 140 members to the Second World Assembly on Ageing held in Madrid in 2002.

So far, the United Nations has adopted the Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and has successfully adopted the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1966, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in 1965, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989, and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (ICRMW) in 1990. After the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was adopted on December 13, 2006, "the Convention on the Rights of Older Persons" became the last remaining task to fulfill the human rights for all.

We believe that one of the most challenging issues for human beings in the 21st century should be ensuring the human rights of older persons in light of the fast and global ageing in societies and poor human rights condition for older persons.

Therefore, we respectfully request the United Nations to adopt "the Convention on the Rights of Older Persons", which is the last and most important area to realize for universal human rights.

To fulfill the purpose, the new convention should be based on the proceeding of the United Nations Principles for Older Persons in 1991 as well as the Madrid

International Plan of Action on Ageing in 2002, but we believe the Japan Older Persons' Charter we developed in 1988 could also serve as a good reference.

Best wishes for your good health and prosperity toward the realization of the world's peace and human rights.

May 3, 2010

Chairman Kamitsubo Yoh
Japan NGO Network on Aging

Facts on Japanese older persons

In Japan, ageing society and human rights for older persons is a serious problem. Not to mention the need to ensure the human rights stipulated in the Constitution of Japan, we need to promote and protect human rights more broadly and effectively through adopting “the Convention on the Rights of Older Persons”.

1 Increasing Anxiety

After the Japanese government’s neoliberal structural reform in the 1980s, anxiety has increased among the Japanese, including older persons, as well as adults and younger persons who cannot have any vision for their old age. Popular quips among older persons in Japan these days are “save money for senior life” and “live soundly and die suddenly”. That is to say, they would not like to live a life supported by others but live well just before departing this world.

2 Denial of Dignity, Self-determination, Freedom of Choice and Equality

Older persons’ lives are getting to be limited, having less self-determination and freedom of choice. Therefore, some of them are hardly treated as dignified individuals now. These days, social exclusion of older persons is getting to be more serious, and a variety of nursing homes and care houses may offer another convenient “dumping ground” for society to abandon the unwanted aged.

3 Infringement of Right to Live in Own House Stably

Ageing and depopulation is growing serious in rural areas, and many deserted older persons are forced to leave their ancestral homes to live in the city, only to suffer from moving around due to the rise in land prices and steep increase of the house rent.

4 Infringement of Right to Life

Older persons living in town are also getting to be more isolated and many older persons die alone. Japan introduced the Long-Term Care Insurance System proclaiming “socialization of elderly care” in 2000, but this system, on the one hand, has reduced the burden of the government and local governments, and on the other

hand has increased the economical, physical and mental burden of the family. Thus, there have been tragic cases of murder of wives, husbands or parents by their family members who could not bear any more load for caring for their loved ones. There are always some people who commit suicide after such a homicide. All the more, after the government allowed the private sector to get into the Long-Term Care Insurance System, the area of social welfare and nursing became the market for those who pursue profit, being infested with the commercialism, and ending in the deplorable situation that covetous businesses exploiting needy people are rampant in society. Especially in "group homes" where it is lawful to have one untrained, part-time, and undesignated worker on night duty, older persons suffer from criminal conduct, including "homicide" and fire incidents. In a non-designated "fee-based nursing home," ten older persons were killed by a fire accident.

5 Infringement of Right to Health and Discrimination by Age

Japan's the Law of Health and Medical Service Law for the Aged in 1983 introduced a discriminatory medical system which degraded the level of medical care for people of 65 years old and above. The new health insurance scheme for older persons, named "Health Insurance for the Old· Old" established in 2008 much strengthened discrimination toward older persons.

6 Infringement of Living Right and Right to Social Security

Japanese social security systems are on a reverse course and the budget for such systems is decreasing. The government repealed the special allowance by age from the livelihood protection system. The amount of old-age pension was reduced, and the amount of basic pension, which was introduced for every citizen as a safeguard, is too low to guarantee the minimum standard of living. Such a situation is increasing anxiety among older persons living in Japan. The social inequality among Japanese society is enlarging the gap between the rich and the poor, not only the older persons but also the deprived people of all ages are suffering.

The examples I referred to in this letter are only the tip of the iceberg. Older persons' rights are infringed in Japan. We have been struggling to construct a peaceful society without nuclear weapon and a safe society which ensures the human rights of older persons and every other person. It is needless to say that we need to develop a national movement more and more in order to change such a

lamentable situation in Japan, but also it should greatly elevate our effort if the United Nations would adopt “the Convention on the Rights of Older Persons”. We believe such an adoption surely leads to the triumph in the challenge toward human rights for older persons of the world.