

NGO Joint Submission for UPR of Japan, October 2012

Minority Women

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Ainu Association of Hokkaido, Sapporo Branch
Buraku Liberation League Central Women's Division
Apeuro Women's Survey Project
IMADR-JC

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In relation to the subparagraph 8 of the recommendations of the UPR first cycle

“To address the problems faced by women belonging to minorities”

1. Identification of challenges in relation to the implementation of accepted recommendations

Fundamental challenge is that there is lack of political will for the government to address the problems faced by women belonging to minority. The Japanese government does not conduct any surveys and has no data regarding the status of minority women (despite the fact that CEDAW recommended it twice in 2003 and 2009). There are neither concrete measures nor any specific plans to address the problems faced by women belonging to minorities, especially indigenous Ainu, Buraku and Zainichi Korean, in the government policy. There are no minority woman representatives to any policy advisory committees or any conferences under the gender equality bureau. (or There is complete failure to ensure the presence or active participation of Buraku, Ainu and Zainichi Korean women in deliberation, preparation and evaluation of women’s policy.)

2. Background

Since previous UPR examination in 2008, there are no concrete actions to address the problems faced by minority women. In the third Basic Plan for Gender Equality in 2010, the government touched upon the word “Ainu” and “Dowa(buraku)” for the first time (under the priority field 8 on “creation of an environment in which people such as the elderly, the disabled, and non-Japanese people can live safely”). However, there are no any specific measures or plans.

Ainu, Buraku and Zainichi Korean women conducted the questionnaire survey on minority women in the fields of education, employment, welfare, health and violence in the period from 2004 to 2010. Survey results show special needs of public assistance especially in the field of education and consultant of Domestic Violence. We kept asking the Gender Equality Bureau to have a hearing meeting at the Specialist Committee on Basic Issues Gender Impact Assessment and Evaluation in order for committee members to understand the issues of minority women. However, even having single hearing meeting is not realized.

3. Recommendations:

- 1) We urge the government to take specific measures of issues faced by women belonging to minorities in the fields of education, employment, welfare, health and violence. To be specific, among others;**
 - i) Continue to run and support literacy classes and implement education assistance**

Our survey results show that many women face difficulties in reading and writing, particularly women in their 50s or older. In addition to establishing and continuing literacy classes, administrative measures must be taken to ensure that necessary support for them is available. Further, internet use is low, pointing to a need to provide support through opportunities for internet training. Assistance must also be offered to women who have not been given educational opportunities in the past, through government-run counseling.
 - ii) Nurture counselors to be sensitive to the difficulties faced by minority women.**

There is a pressing need to nurture counselors that Ainu, Buraku and Zainichi Korean women can trust to approach regarding the violence they are suffering, whether also women, or people sensitive to the problems they face. There is thus a need to provide current counselors with human rights training on the needs of minority women. At the same time the government should provide public assistance to minority women to become professional counselors.
- 2) We urge that the perspectives of minority women, including indigenous Ainu, Buraku and Zainichi Korean women, be reflected in government policy on women, and that to this end, minority women representatives be preferentially appointed to decision-making bodies and councils of both the national and local government, when such bodies deliberate on and/or decide women's policies**
- 3) We urge the government to obtain and provide comprehensive information regarding the living conditions and awareness of minority women including Ainu, Buraku, and Zainichi Korean, by implementing a fact-finding survey covering, in particular, the fields of education, employment, health and exposure to violence.**

4. Issues and Concerns

1) Ainu Women

Long before the colonial rule by Japan that started 140 years ago, Ainu people developed their own unique culture, society and history, and maintained their own beliefs, values and knowledge in the land called Ainu Mosir (located in northern Japan). However, in the course of modernization of Japan, Ainu people have been denied their unique culture and deprived of land and livelihood, had their very existence as a separate people refuted, and been driven into discrimination and poverty. Consequently, even today, the living standards of Ainu people are far below than those of the general Japanese population. The Hokkaido Ainu Survey on Living Conditions of 2006 and the Survey on Living Conditions of Ainu People of 2008 conducted by Hokkaido University demonstrate these facts. Findings of the surveys showed clear differences in annual incomes, percentage of welfare recipients, lifestyle, occupations and percentage of higher school enrolments among those from the Ainu community, when compared to the general public. As Ainu women are subject to multiple forms of discrimination, they are generally placed in even more severe circumstances than the men in our communities. As women of this indigenous community, we find that we have no legal means or recourse with which to improve our situation under Japanese law.

i) Education

The Sapporo Branch of Ainu Association of Hokkaido took part in the 2004 survey on Ainu women. The survey questionnaire was completed by 241 Ainu women belonging to 14 different branches of the Association. The survey included questions regarding the education level of Ainu women. A majority of respondents (60% of all respondents, 77% of whom were aged above 40) had not completed schooling beyond elementary or junior high school. 36% of respondents had graduated from senior high school. This is in contrast to the general 93.5% high school attendance rate in Hokkaido municipalities in which Ainu reside, as recorded in the 2006 Hokkaido Ainu Survey on Living Conditions of 2006.

ii) Consultation of Domestic Violence

Among those that confided in or consulted others regarding the violence they had suffered, 14% said they had approached doctors, rather than family or friends, perhaps because of the after effects of the physical or verbal abuse. No one had approached public consultants. In some cases, the spouse had verbally abused the woman by insulting all Ainu women, and that led to being hurt and feelings of self-contempt, as well as the loss of pride as a human being. This made us think about how much better it would be to have a shelter for women who suffer this violence, where they can feel safe and have people to consult for advice. Considering that fact that no one had approached public consultants, Ainu women need Ainu consultants. Sixty-four percent left this question blank, despite there being the choice “I did not consult anyone/anywhere.”

2) Buraku Women

i) Low School Attendance and Education Enrolment rate among Buraku Women

There is a gender disparity in education levels within the Buraku community, as indicated by the lower percentage of Buraku women who go on to higher education. Among parents of Buraku children, many wish to send their sons to “college,” while limiting the educational support for girl children to a two year “junior college or specialized vocational schools.” This preference is reflected in the above gender-based educational disparity. The causes behind this phenomenon include the fact that programs did not exist to support learning and academic achievement within the Buraku community when these parents were primary school students so Buraku parents themselves often have limited education, and as a result may have less interest in education for their children, and the educational environment at home and in the Buraku community is not always conducive to tertiary education.

ii) Illiteracy among Buraku Women and Need for Remedial Measures

When disaggregated by age group, a higher percentage of elderly Buraku people have difficulties in reading and writing, whereas by gender, a higher percentage of women in the same age group have literacy problems. The Constitution of Japan guarantees the right to education, and it is a basic requirement that every person be able to read and write in order to function in contemporary society. Yet access to education is not fully secured for Buraku women and children. For these reasons, many Buraku people, including both the elderly as well as younger groups, do not freely read and write.

iii) The Need to Improve Employment Conditions for Buraku Women

The occupational opportunities and wages of some Buraku women are affected by their origin, as some Buraku women find their job applications rejected, due to personal background investigations by employers, which uncover that they are Buraku. The current economic recession has also negatively impacted on the employment of Buraku people, and Buraku women in particular are vulnerable due to job cuts in manufacturing and other manual labor work. Difficulty for Buraku women in obtaining stable jobs originates in their educational backgrounds, which leave them no choice but to take seasonal or irregular work or jobs at small companies.

The present situation of Buraku women, including their socioeconomic status is a result of exclusion from education due to Buraku discrimination and the resulting literacy difficulties many Buraku women have. When combined with discrimination in employment against Buraku, the result is that many Buraku women are obliged to accept unstable jobs or seasonal/irregular work.

3) Zainichi Korean Women

i) Education

Exposed to human rights abuses due to festering discrimination and prejudice in the Japanese school system, Zainichi Korean children are denied the exercise of their fundamental freedoms. Ethnic schools such as Korean schools, Chinese schools and Brazilian schools in Japan are not entitled to receive financial subsidies or preferential tax treatment. Graduates from these schools are not recognized as qualified to sit university entrance examinations and are excluded from the application of government school health policies. When many girl students of Korean schools suffered violence from members of the public in Japan, the Government of Japan did not take any steps to counter these human rights abuses. To protect themselves from these violent attacks, Korean schools had no option but to change the design of uniforms for female students, which were modeled on Korean ethnic costume. Also, a student was denied membership of a students club in a Japanese university simply because she was a Zainichi Korean. These are emergent human rights problems caused by political failure of Japan.

ii) Equality in Political and Public Activities

More than 2.15 million people of 190 different foreign nationalities reside in Japan. Of this total, permanent residents make up 870,000, consisting of 430,000 special permanent residents (those from countries formerly colonized by Japan, and their descendants) and 440,000 general permanent residents. As the longest permanent residents, Zainichi Koreans in Japan are currently of their fourth and fifth generations, creditable members of society who have met their tax obligations and contributed to the progress of society. Despite this, they are not given suffrage because of their lack of Japanese nationality, thus excluding them from the sphere of political and public activities. This is also due to the fact that Japan has not taken any action to provide post-war reparations in the context of its colonialist history.

* Zainichi means: residing in Japan.