

## The 50<sup>th</sup> Convention of Nikkei and Japanese Abroad DECLARATION

Every year since 1957, we, the volunteers and representatives of Nikkei and Japanese living in various countries, have gathered in Japan to attend the Convention of Nikkei and Japanese Abroad, which is organized by the Association of Nikkei and Japanese Abroad. This year marked the milestone 50<sup>th</sup> Convention of Nikkei and Japanese Abroad, which was held over the three-day period from October 14 to 16, 2009 in Tokyo. In particular, on the occasion of the Welcoming Ceremony, held on the evening of October 14, all participants were deeply honored and humbly appreciative of the attendance of Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress of Japan. Filled with deep emotion, this year we took a look back over the fifty times the Convention has been held, setting the overall theme as “Communities of Nikkei and Japanese Abroad and Japan: Looking back at the Conventions of Nikkei and Japanese Abroad over the past half century and seeking the co-existence and prosperity of both sides.” In doing so we were returning to what could be described as the very basis for the Convention, an examination of the current issues facing Nikkei communities abroad and their co-existence with Japan. The following specific themes were identified for discussion.

Theme 1: Communities of Nikkei and Japanese Abroad and Japan

Theme 2: Seeking Coexistence and Prosperity

- 1) Utilization and strengthening of Japanese language schools
- 2) In search of new opportunities for Nikkei residing in Japan
- 3) Cultivating young leaders and the Nikkei community

Theme 3: Other Measures

The Convention saw much vigorous discussion of these themes and the results of discussions have been compiled into the following five resolutions, which we hereby declare in the name of the Convention.

## RESOLUTIONS

### **1. We will support the Convention of Japanese and Nikkei Abroad and the Association of Nikkei and Japanese Abroad**

The Convention of Japanese and Nikkei Abroad has always been held for the purpose of promoting goodwill through exchange and understanding about Japan, and this year celebrated the fiftieth occasion it has been held. The Convention is the single greatest opportunity for our voices, those of Nikkei abroad, to be heard directly in Japan, and over the years we have served a role as a bridge between Japan and the countries in which we reside. We have engaged in a variety of cultural activities in various countries as a means of developing the Nikkei communities and this has also led to a dissemination of Japanese culture in the countries where we reside. These activities have also perhaps been linked to the national interest of Japan, and we take pride that the source of this perception is the frequent mention by the Japanese government that Nikkei abroad are an overseas asset for Japan. It can be said that the positive appraisal of our activities in our adoptive countries has resulted in our identity as Nikkei being strengthened. At the milestone of this 50<sup>th</sup> Convention, when we consider our relationship with Japan, we have recognized anew through our discussions today the incomparable significance of the Convention of Nikkei and Japanese Abroad.

The challenges currently facing the Nikkei community can generally be identified as including human resources development, Japanese heritage language education, and welfare issues. It is also a fact that over our history of dealing with and promoting such issues, the assistance provided by the Japanese government, beginning with Japan's international cooperation organizations, has been an enormous contributing factor. However, in the future, in addition to the support provided by the Japanese government to date, we believe that activities based on a spirit of reciprocity with various private sector organizations in Japan will take on greater importance. We recognize the vital necessity of the role played by the Convention of Nikkei and Japanese Abroad as a link between Nikkei communities and public and private-sector institutions in Japan and we believe it provides a structure that we can utilize to the fullest degree.

It is said that the total number of Nikkei abroad is somewhere between

2.6 and 2.8 million. When compared to the populations of the prefectures of Japan, this figure is equivalent to the population of Kyoto Prefecture at 2.64 million, or to put it another way, the 13<sup>th</sup> most populous of the 47 prefectures of Japan. On this point, we are proud that our activities to send out a message from abroad have great value as we are members of a community greater in number than the average population of a single prefecture in Japan. Given this reality, we strongly support the Convention of Nikkei and Japanese Abroad and its organizer, the Association of Nikkei and Japanese Abroad. We will always hope that our sentiments are understood by the people of Japan, the Japanese government and various related organizations.

## **2. We call for the active utilization of Japanese language schools run by various Nikkei organizations**

Japanese language schools run by various Nikkei organizations are implementing Japanese heritage language education targeting Nikkei children, and in recent years interest among non-Nikkei in Japanese language and culture has been increasing, leading to a similar increase in non-Nikkei attending Japanese language schools. For example, in Brazil last year there was national scale interest in ceremonies to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Japanese emigration to Brazil, and the Japanese language test implemented by the Japanese Language Center in Brazil saw a 10% jump in the number of non-Nikkei candidates taking the test. Given this situation, we seek to ensure that the existing Japanese language schools run by Nikkei organizations overseas are utilized effectively as hubs for transmitting Japanese culture. A report of the Overseas Exchange Council of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued in February 2008 regarding “measures and structures to strengthen Japan’s international presence” recommended that one means of strengthening Japan’s foreign policy message is to promote Japanese language education among foreigners. We can state with confidence that the Japanese language schools in our own Nikkei communities can function more than adequately as hubs for this purpose. In so doing we believe that we will increase understanding of Japanese language and culture in the countries in which we live, which will link through to the promotion of greater understanding about Japan in general.

### **3. We will support Nikkei residents in Japan**

Following the collapse of the bubble economy in the 1990s, as a result of Nikkei coming to Japan in large numbers to boost the labor force, 20 years later, in the present day, the number of Nikkei residents in Japan has reached approximately 400,000. However, due to the impact of the simultaneous global economic downturn that began in the autumn of 2008, many Nikkei have found that their employment opportunities have been severely curtailed, including cessation of temporary working contracts and lay-offs. Facing this situation it is said that 40,000 Nikkei Brazilians have chosen to return to their home country. The children of these people are only able to understand Japanese and upon their return to Brazil have faced difficulties as the language of instruction in Brazilian schools is Portuguese. Many Nikkei in Japan are now seeking to settle in Japan and find employment. In an emergency questionnaire implemented in August this year in the town of Oizumi in Gunma Prefecture, which is home to many Nikkei, 68% of respondents indicated that their life had changed in comparison to one year previously, and 54% of those whose life had changed responded that the changes had been economic in nature. Facing such circumstances the Nikkei resident in Japan are living in a state of unease and with a sense of crisis. In addition to employment issues, other problems are being experienced, particularly by children, with non-attendance rates at schools increasing and incidences of bullying also occurring.

These Nikkei residents wish to make their lives in Japan but are currently unable to do so and we will provide comprehensive support to ensure that they can lead stable lives.

### **4. We have great expectations of young Nikkei leaders**

Generational change is progressing apace in the overseas Nikkei communities and cultivating young leaders who will take these communities forward is an issue of the utmost importance. Former students and trainees who spent time in Japan 20 or 30 years ago to study or to engage in training are now emerging in various positions of seniority, including as chairs of prefectural societies or senior members of Nikkei organizations. Some are also active in the political arena and as the number of Nikkei who are engaged in senior positions continues to increase, we get a palpable feeling

that some of the results of the study and training in Japan are now becoming evident in Nikkei communities. We recognize the fact that human resources development is not something that can be expected to have an immediate effect. It is rather something that requires a long-term and ongoing approach. Moving forward to the future, we believe that for Nikkei in Japan and overseas, the opportunities provided through study and scholarships have the greatest effect in linking through to the stability and further development of Nikkei communities.

In addition, looking domestically at Japan, we see that there is no unifying, national organization for Nikkei communities and the cultivation of young leaders who will take Nikkei communities forward to the future is essential. In light of such circumstances the Nippon Foundation Nikkei Scholars Association is actively engaged in a number of projects in addition to its other academic work, including the introduction of a scholarship system targeting Brazilian schools in Japan. These projects are implemented with a unique vitality, and include students speaking before their peers about their dreams for the future and engaging in activities to realize those dreams, as well as a drawing contest for students. We give such activities and projects our heartfelt support.

**5. We seek efforts to increase the number of persons overseas who are registered to vote in Japanese elections and the expansion and enhancement of the system for exercising the right to vote overseas**

In the 45<sup>th</sup> general election for the House of Councilors, which took place on August 30, 2009, for the first time ever registered overseas voters were eligible to exercise their right to vote in single seat constituencies, thus realizing one of our long-held wishes. However, among the ranks of Japanese persons who hold Japanese nationality and reside overseas, voices are being increasingly heard for the establishment of overseas constituencies, which would represent the Japanese community overseas and allow it to participate in the national politics of Japan. Additionally, in order to enhance the system of overseas voting, measures are required that would substantially simplify the current procedures, including the replacement of the complex “voter certificate” with an electoral register for Japanese persons registered overseas.

It is our dearest hope that many of our friends who possess the right to vote while overseas will make further efforts to register for an overseas voter certificate, and that the system for exercising the right to vote overseas continues to be expanded and enhanced.

Agreed by All Participants  
The 50<sup>th</sup> Convention of Nikkei and Japanese Abroad  
October 15, 2009