

The 51st Convention of Nikkei and Japanese Abroad DECLARATION

We, the volunteers and representatives of Nikkei and Japanese living in various countries, have gathered in Tokyo, Japan to attend the 51st Convention of Nikkei and Japanese Abroad, over the three-day period from October 20 to 22, 2010. The overall theme for the Convention was “Road-Map for the Nikkei People's Life: Seeking the Further Development of Nikkei Communities Abroad,” and various issues were addressed by four Working Groups.

Working Group Theme 1: Japanese Language Education and Japanese Culture

Working Group Theme 2: Nikkei Living in Japan

Working Group Theme 3: Nikkei Youth Meeting

Working Group Theme 4: Dual Citizenship, Overseas Voting, and Pensions

The Convention saw much vigorous discussion in both the Working Groups and the Plenary Session and the results have been compiled into the following seven resolutions, which we hereby declare in the name of the Convention.

RESOLUTIONS

1. We will continue to make efforts to pass on Japanese language skills to the next generation through Japanese heritage language education

The question of how we should pass on to the next generation our culture and the Japanese language, which have been passed down from our homeland of Japan, is one of the most fundamental challenges facing our overseas Nikkei communities. In the North America and South American regions, where Nikkei communities have a long history of immigration and are widely dispersed, Nikkei organizations are operating Japanese language schools, which function as hubs for the transmission of Japanese culture. The “passing down and preservation of Japanese culture centered on Japanese heritage language education” is something that overseas Nikkei communities have supported and it is also essential if Nikkei organizations are to grow and develop in the future.

However, the number of Japanese language teachers who speak Japanese as their native tongue and who possess a background closely linked to Japanese culture are dwindling. Even in Brazil, which is home to the largest number of Nikkei, the number of Nikkei language instructors with appropriate skills has decreased. There is a limit to what can be achieved in Japanese language instruction by private schools, which are prevalent in overseas Nikkei communities. For these reasons a concept has been presented that it is necessary to incorporate Japanese language education into higher education programs and nurture Japanese language instructors who possess appropriate teaching qualifications. The city of São Paulo has proposed an initiative

for the establishment of a Japan-Brazil International University.

We, the Nikkei who live overseas, hope fervently that the people who will lead Nikkei communities in the future, particularly second and third-generation Nikkei, will realize and understand the importance of acquiring Japanese language skills and we are researching and putting into practice ways to improve Japanese language teaching and acquisition. For these reasons it is necessary for the prefectural overseas student scholarship system, which has been downsized in recent years, to be revived and expanded, to reinvigorate the numbers of young people travelling to Japan to study.

2. Nikkei play a role as a bridge for conveying Japanese culture to the world

It is now more than 140 years since the first groups of Japanese emigrated to Hawaii. In the initial stages of emigration, Japanese culture, in particular food, clothing and housing, as well as cultural arts such as *tanka* and *haiku* poetry, served as a foundation for enjoying life overseas. Even now, the events organized by overseas Nikkei communities around the world give pleasure to the citizens of those countries and these events have grown and developed in the communities where they are held. These are events that are held around the world and on a large-scale, examples of which include the “cherry blossom festivals” in many areas of North America, the “Nisei Week Japanese Festival” in Los Angeles, the “Powell Street Festival” in Vancouver, the “Festival do Japão” in São Paulo, and the “Children’s Day Festival” in Mexico, as well as various autumn festivals.

In this way, we the Nikkei are playing a role as a bridge for bringing Japanese culture to a wide audience overseas, which is something that we also want Japanese people to understand. We also call on Japanese people to participate actively in the various events held by Nikkei communities around the world.

3. We call for greater collaboration and solidarity with Latin American Nikkei living in Japan

The number of Nikkei living in Japan exceeded 400,000 approximately two years ago, but this figure is estimated to have dropped by approximately 20% to 320,000. The global recession that started in the United States forced many Nikkei to return to their home countries, as employment dried up, or as they were dismissed from their jobs. The environment for Nikkei has not improved very much subsequently, with the current reality being that many Nikkei are living on the bread line through part-time jobs or short-term employment contracts.

However, a number of Nikkei who have made their home in Japan for the last 20 to 25 years have established non-profit organizations and volunteer groups that aim to support Nikkei living in the various regions of Japan and help them to become self-reliant and live together with the Japanese community around them, and these

organizations have launched various activities. Of these activities, the network for Brazilian Nikkei, who are most numerous, has been working to strengthen its cooperation with Nikkei from Peru and other countries. In the Working Group discussion at the Convention there were those who expressed the opinion that by sharing experience of various activities, if a “Latin American network” could be achieved, this could be expected to make activities easier to organize and mobilize.

In order to expand the limited employment choices for Nikkei living in Japan it is important for them to make more proactive efforts to acquire Japanese language skills. By doing this it would be possible to construct an organization and information network that covers all Nikkei, and would also enable these Nikkei to transmit the cultures of Latin America to Japanese communities, as well as boosting business opportunities. We also seek to expand activities to include cooperation with overseas Nikkei communities.

There are many cases in which the problems facing Nikkei living in Japan have been resolved thanks to systematic measures implemented by the Japanese government. We offer our heartfelt thanks to the Japanese government for the various measures that have been implemented, including support for Nikkei returning to their home countries and assistance with Japanese language education with a view to gaining employment that was implemented from last year, as well as the “Preparation Course for Reintegration of Nikkei into Employment,” and the “Niji-no-Kakehashi Kyoshitsu” for Nikkei children. We hope that these measures will continue to be implemented in the future.

4. We will mobilize Nikkei youth

We the Nikkei youth, who will be the leaders of the next generation, call for all Nikkei youth around the world to join hands in friendship and participate actively through the Convention of Nikkei and Japanese Abroad towards the creation of a new community. Those of us who are studying in Japan, seek to use the knowledge we have gained in Japan and put it to good use not only in our home countries, but around the world.

The Nikkei Youth Meeting provides a forum for us to strengthen our identity as Nikkei. It also enables us to affirm the diversity of our various roots as we engage in interaction and exchange, and consider the activities various Nikkei youth groups and projects that are being formed in various regions of the world, as well as means of creating cross-border, international cooperation that aims to bring these projects to fruition. The Nikkei Youth Network (NYN) was established in Tokyo by participants in previous youth meetings and its stated goal of “providing a foundation to provide opportunities for exchange and innovative inspiration to Nikkei” is in accordance with our own thoughts and we express our respect for its stated aims.

Youth meetings provide a forum for the creation of new ideas and we will engage in actions on a global scale in order to ensure a future for Nikkei communities for the next 100 years.

5. We call for the acceptance of dual citizenship

There are many Japanese people who, after emigrating overseas, have renounced their Japanese nationality and acquired the nationality of their adoptive countries, in order to engage in work more smoothly in those countries. However, there are also people who, in the course of time have retired and no longer need to retain the nationality of their adoptive countries. Furthermore, people who have moved overseas to various countries for international marriage have also expressed their wish to maintain the nationality of the country where they live and also acquire Japanese nationality, due to a need to return to Japan to care for elderly parents or for the purpose of their children's education. Given this background there is a petition movement gaining pace in various regions, urging the restoration of Japanese nationality for such people. At the same time, it is also a fact that there are many second generation Japanese who were born overseas and maintain their Japanese nationality.

We are concerned that for the Nikkei who have an active global presence, the fact that they have to choose a single nationality upon reaching adulthood presents an obstacle to their activities and could also lead to an outflow of excellent minds and skills. In this context, we hereby call on the Japanese to permit dual nationality.

6. We request the introduction of a simple method of overseas voting in elections, such as electronic voting

Ten years has passed since the implementation of overseas voting and in this period a total of seven national elections have taken place. However the current reality is that the number of persons registered to vote overseas and the actual voting rate both remain low. The cause of this situation is the complexity of registration procedures, together with systemic issues such as the method of voting.

We therefore request that the Japanese government takes appropriate steps and comes to a decision on the introduction of measures to simplify the overseas voting process to better reflect the opinions of Japanese living overseas in the processes of national government. These measures could include the automatic registration of voters at the city (or ward) office upon their emigration overseas, with a voting notification being distributed (by post) automatically to persons registered to vote, and voting being made possible by fax at overseas Japanese diplomatic missions or the simpler option of electronic voting. We request that the Japanese government considers these proposals in conjunction with the creation of overseas constituencies.

7. We hope for and encourage the promotion of social security agreements with other countries

On July 29 this year, the “Agreement between Japan and the Federative Republic of Brazil on Social Security,” was signed. We hope that procedures to put this agreement into effect will be promptly completed. The signing of this agreement brings the total number of countries with which social security agreements have been concluded by the Japanese government to 14. If Japan were to conclude social security agreements with a greater number of countries, this would give further stability to the activities of Nikkei around the world and enable such activities to be further expanded. We hope that the conclusion of similar social security agreements with other countries that are home to Nikkei populations will be promoted, and encourage the Japanese government to engage in efforts to that end.