

The 52nd 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 52nd Convention of Nikkei and Japanese Abroad, over the three-day period from October 26 to 28, 2011. The overall theme for the Convention was “Let’s strengthen the Social Bonds with Japan-Facing a National Crisis in Japan, the Significance and Roles of Nikkei Communities Abroad” and various issues were addressed by three Working Groups.

Working Group Theme 1: Japan, especially in local communities and Nikkei Society

Working Group Theme 2: Nikkei Living in Japan

Working Group Theme 3: Nikkei Youth Meeting

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

RESOLUTIONS

1. We will continue to make every effort to offer support and assistance for rebuilding Japan in the wake of the unprecedented Great East Japan Earthquake – “Ganbare! Japan”

The Great East Japan Earthquake, which inflicted damage on a scale never before experienced, profoundly shocked Japanese and Nikkei living overseas. Not merely thinking about the safety and wellbeing of friends and acquaintances, Nikkei communities around the world responded to the great disaster that had befallen Japan by almost simultaneously launching relief fund-raising activities to “Support Japan.” The great majority of the funds that have been raised have already been provided to the disaster-affected regions, through local Japanese consulates, the Japanese Red Cross Society, and the Association of Nikkei & Japanese Abroad. In response to the disaster Nikkei living in Japan hurried to the disaster-affected regions, where they have engaged in volunteer activities to provide relief to victims. However, Nikkei living in far-off countries overseas, while being distressed at the disaster, have been unable to visit the affected regions, instead praying for the revival of their homeland from afar.

We will continue to make every effort to support and assist reconstruction and revival efforts. Nikkei communities believe in Japan’s vitality and offer their support to “Ganbare! Japan.”

2. We will make efforts to promote the spread of Japanese culture and support

Japanese heritage language education.

In order to nurture and develop human resources who will take the lead in the next generation of Nikkei communities, and work to promote the spread of Japanese culture and vitalize Nikkei communities, the implementation of Japanese heritage language education and development of Nikkei Japanese language schools are essential. Japanese heritage language education does not involve merely learning the Japanese language, such education serves as a pillar of “emigration studies,” whereby the passing on of Japanese language from parents to children and then from children to grandchildren offers opportunities to learning about Japanese culture and one’s own roots. “Emigration studies” is the study of emigration and Nikkei communities from the three perspectives of “history of emigration,” “the contribution of Nikkei to nation building,” and “bonds between two cultures.” Such studies aim to cultivate in people an identity as a Nikkei. By engaging in these studies we believe that students will learn about both the cultures of Japan and the country where they live, thus leading to the development of broad- and open-minded people who can act as a bridge between the two countries.

Japanese heritage language education requires the development and cultivation of outstanding teachers who will support such education, and one of the most important programs for this is training for Japanese heritage language education teachers implemented by international cooperation organizations. It is also necessary to revive or enhance prefectural-funded systems for promoting study in Japan, thus providing further learning opportunities for young Nikkei who have acquired Japanese language skills, and invigorating study in Japan for overseas students.

3. We will further improve welfare for elderly Nikkei.

It is said that there is a “return to Japan” phenomenon occurring among elderly immigrants with regard to food culture and living styles. In particular, among the first generation Nikkei who are now advanced in years and require nursing care, there is a requirement for a “food, clothing and housing environment” that is suited to Japanese people, including Japanese-style accommodation and Japanese cuisine. In response to this need Nikkei retirement homes and Nikkei nursing homes are being constructed in Nikkei communities around the world. In addition, depending on the country Nikkei communities are actually engaged in efforts to protect poor and vulnerable Nikkei and provide support for various issues, including old age and disability. It goes without saying that we will work to resolve such issues and challenges and we call on others, including the Japanese Government and private-sector organizations, to continue to provide assistance to such people.

4. We call for understanding and cooperation for Nikkei living in Japan who are experiencing difficulties.

The number of Nikkei living in Japan exceeded 400,000 in recent times, but has since dropped to a current level of approximately 300,000 people. The global recession that started in the United States in 2008, couple with the shock of the recent Great East Japan Earthquake has prompted many Nikkei to leave Japan for their home countries. The Nikkei who have determined to remain in Japan are facing a difficult situation in terms of employment, with very little job security. Many of these Nikkei consider Japan to be their second home country and it is also a fact that while enduring hardship as they seek to achieve a stable livelihood they remain full of feelings of gratitude towards Japan. The speed at which these Nikkei living in Japan moved to engage in volunteer activities following the Great East Japan Earthquake could be said to be a manifestation of this gratitude. In particular, even in the midst of a difficult fiscal situation, the Japanese Government is making efforts to provide support programs for foreign residents in Japan, and Nikkei are also benefiting from such programs.

Nonetheless, there are many problems with the situation facing Nikkei, and the necessity for action to resolve issues such as employment, education and aging communities, is something that is recognized by the Nikkei themselves. We call for greater understanding and cooperation from a wider spectrum of the Japanese public in response to these issues.

5. We call for Japan to accept “dual citizenship,” and make it possible for people to be citizens of two countries.

Japan recognizes the right of minors to “hold nationality two or more countries” (dual citizenship), but when a person comes of age, he or she is required to choose a nationality. The emigrants living overseas have moved to other countries for a variety of purposes, including as agricultural emigrants in the post-war period, living permanently overseas for business or moving overseas for an international marriage. Their reasons for choosing to forgo their Japanese nationality are similarly diverse. Many of these overseas emigrants and Nikkei desire dual citizenship. There is a hope among people who are living their lives in various regions around the world that they can maintain their nationality of the country in which they reside while also attaining Japanese nationality, for the purpose of caring for elderly relatives living in Japan or for the purpose of their children’s education. At the same time there are many second generation Nikkei who were born overseas and who, while retaining Japanese nationality have acquired dual citizenship of the country where they reside.

Japanese emigrants and Nikkei living abroad are said to be an overseas “asset” of Japan, but once they come of age and select the nationality of the country to which they have emigrated their Japanese citizenship is not permitted, meaning that Japan is throwing away these precious overseas assets of its own volition. This is the reason why we continue to request the Japanese Government permit dual citizenship.

6. “Nikkei youth” will utilize their experiences of overseas study in a broad range of scenarios.

At this convention many young people from “Nikkei youth” participated in working groups and almost all of these young people are residing in Japan for the purposes of study or training. There were also some students who have been living in Japan from a young age to receive their education.

Following the Great East Japan Earthquake the Nikkei youth participated in volunteer activities in the affected regions in cooperation with young people from other countries and with Japanese people, making a small contribution reconstruction efforts. Through these endeavors the Nikkei youth were able to relate to Japan as Nikkei and recognize once again their bonds with Japan. These efforts also enabled us to realize that the heartfelt support and wishes for Japan’s reconstruction are felt not only by Nikkei communities in our home countries, but by society as a whole in these countries.

We seek to utilize the specialist knowledge and experience we have acquired in Japan in a global context. Our discussions and exchanges of opinions during the Convention on the various possibilities that are open to us, including the option of employment in Japan, were of great significance. We aim to become people whose skills are highly evaluated and appreciated around the world, and we will also continue to treasure our links with Japan.

7. We request the introduction of a simple method of overseas voting in elections.

Looking back over the 11 years since the implementation of overseas voting, we perceive that one of the major factors behind why the number of persons registered to vote overseas and the actual voting rate remain low is due systemic issues relating to elections, such as the complexity and difficulty of registration procedures and the method of voting. We propose the following measures, which would simplify and improve the process:

- (1) Automatic registration of voters at the city (or ward) office upon their emigration overseas;
- (2) Automatic distribution of voting notification (by post) to persons registered to vote; and
- (3) Voting being made possible by fax at overseas Japanese diplomatic missions or the simpler option of the introduction of electronic voting, etc.

We therefore request the Japanese Government to take appropriate measures and make a decision that will not necessitate the creation of an electoral voting system, but will simply and practically enable Japanese living overseas to participate in national elections.

We also request that the Japanese government considers these proposals in conjunction with the creation of overseas constituencies.

8. We will further develop international Nikkei networks.

Without the internet we cannot even begin to imagine how we can convey and share information internationally. The activities of the various organizations that participated in the Convention are also increasingly including cooperative programs and events both within Japan and with neighboring countries. The International Nikkei Network that is operated by the Association of Nikkei & Japanese Abroad could also be utilized to publicize the activities of these various organizations to other people in addition to their own members. We believe that we are now called upon to further develop the International Nikkei Network, and publicize and share the vigorous activities of Nikkei communities with people around the world.

Requests

1. We request the conclusion of a visa waiver agreement between Japan and Brazil.

Consultations between Japan and Brazil have been initiated towards the conclusion of a bilateral visa waiver agreement and we request that these consultations include consideration of the short-term stay visa, which would have a significant impact on permanent residents and Nikkei communities in Brazil.

2. We request that measures be implemented to ensure that the Convention of Nikkei and Japanese Abroad may be implemented in a multi-lingual environment.

In view of the fact that many Nikkei communities now include third and fourth generation Nikkei, we request that the Convention of Nikkei and Japanese Abroad be implemented in a multi-lingual environment.