

Summary

The year 2011 will be especially recorded in the history of Japan as the year of the Great East Japan Earthquake and the resultant tsunami of March 11, which caused such widespread and extensive damage to the northern part of the country. Due to this disaster, the 12th Asian Ombudsman Association (AOA) Conference originally planned for May 2011 had to be postponed, but thanks to the cooperation of honorable members of the AOA, the Conference was eventually successfully held in Tokyo and Shizuoka from 5th to 8th December, 2011.

10 years ago, Japan hosted the 6th AOA Conference and all programs were conducted in the capital city of Tokyo. For the 2011 Conference, we initiated an attempt to stage it not only in the urban area but also in the countryside, so that foreign participants could deepen their understanding of Japan. We drew up a program of events commencing in Tokyo then transferring by the Shinkansen 'Bullet Train' to the eastern part of Shizuoka Prefecture, at the foot of Mt. Fuji.

The Conference was honored to have as its head Ms. C. C. Morales, Vice President of AOA and Ombudsman of the Philippines, complemented by Ms. B.A. Wakem, President of the International Ombudsman Institute and Chief Ombudsman of New Zealand as keynote speaker. More than 60 other Ombudsmen and their staff from 19 countries and areas of Asia and other parts of the world participated. It was one of the largest-scale AOA Conferences, with in total 170 Japanese participants, including Ombudsmen from local government, academics and researchers, and administrative counselors from all over Japan.

Throughout the Asian region we adhere to the common recognition that we face a number of socio-economic challenges, including a rapidly-changing demographic structure, the global financial crisis and large-scale natural disasters, such as have recently struck New Zealand, Thailand, Iran, Japan and other countries. Under the main theme "Challenges for the Ombudsman in a Changing Socio-Economic Environment" and 5 sub-themes, "the Ombudsman's Cross-Generational Challenges Arising from a Changing Demographic Structure", "The Fundamental Rights of Citizens Pertaining to Access to Information", "Improvement in the Advocacy and Outreach Strategy in Protecting the Vulnerable Segments of the Society", "the Role of Ombudsman in Decentralization, Outsourcing and Public Private Partnerships" and "Identifying People's Concerns from Daily Flow of Complaints and Contributing to Systemic Improvements". In these 5 sessions, to our great pleasure as hosts, there were lively discussions including Question and Answer sessions which sometimes ended up behind schedule.

Between the programmed sessions, we invited an administrative counselor and an MIC staff from the Tohoku area to preside over a special session entitled “Administrative Counseling in the Great East Japan Earthquake” who described their activity as ombudsmen in the affected areas under very critical circumstances. Conference participants were deeply impressed by their great efforts to assist their fellow-citizens during this time of disaster.

Japan’s Administrative Counselors System is a very unique type of Ombudsman system in which private citizens commissioned by the Minister for Internal Affairs and Communications receive peoples’ complaints and requests, and work to bring resolution with the help of government agencies. 2011 was the 50th anniversary of this unique system, and Conference participants took the opportunity of gaining insight into it.

At the end of the program, the General Assembly of AOA was held and elected a new board of directors who will lead the AOA forward over the next 4 years.

Thus we present to you the 12th AOA Conference Report which includes valuable presentations from honorable ombudsmen colleagues and we sincerely hope it will contribute to the development of the Ombudsman institution.

Finally, we would like to extend our warm appreciation to all those who have participated, both from overseas and from our own country Japan, who have helped make this conference such a success. In addition, our thanks go to all who have assisted us, including the AOA Board of Directors, the Secretariat of AOA, Shizuoka Prefecture, Numazu City and their citizens, Eastern Shizuoka Convention Bureau, Izunokuni-city Tourist Association, the Japan Association for Ombudsman Studies, ombudsmen from local government, the administrative counselors and their Associations, Central Japan Railway Co., Keio Plaza Hotel Tokyo, Numazu Riverside Hotel and Ministries and Agencies including Japan Tourism Agency.

The 12th AOA Conference Secretariat
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