

Introduction of Keynote Speakers to the 12th Asian Ombudsman Association Conference

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Ms. Conchita Carpio Morales, Acting President of the Asian Ombudsman Association
Ms. Beverley Wakem, President of the International Ombudsman Institute
Board of Directors and Fellow Members of the Asian Ombudsman Association,
Honorable Ombudsmen and Distinguished Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be with you this afternoon at the opening of the Shizuoka Session of the 12th Conference of the Asian Ombudsman Association. On behalf of the Japanese Ombudsman, may I extend a very warm welcome to all participants in this Conference.

We were most grateful earlier this year that all of you supported our re-scheduling of the Conference which unfortunately had to be postponed due to the Earthquake which struck Japan on 11th March.

And we would like to say thank you to our colleagues in Asia, who sent words of sympathy and encouragement to us. We will never forget your friendship at this very critical time.

The Asian region can be said to be one of the most dynamic and also most attractive areas of the world. Among the achievements of Asian nations which have caught the attention of the wider world we could list dramatic economic growth, a vigorously expanding population and advanced technological development, set alongside the unique and appealing nature and culture of our region.

On the other hand, it could be said that these seemingly positive factors have posed problems, in rendering Asian people vulnerable to sudden and sometimes drastic change. Anyone

browsing articles about Asian countries on website homepages will come across often-repeated topics such as “an aging population” and “changing lifestyles in a rapidly-growing economy”. These issues present challenges to the region’s governments who must try to relieve, or prevent, the frictions and tensions generated by failure to adapt to rapid change. Today’s governments, whatever system they operate in, need to keep a very close watch on the everyday lives of their citizens in order to be able to fulfill their mandate of care and diffuse problems before they arise.

In our experience, governments seldom perform impeccably in the actions taken in fulfillment of these desirable aims. In many cases, there will be complaints and protests on the part of persons or parties who feel they have been treated unfairly.

Enter the Ombudsman!

Which brings me to the main theme of this conference, “Challenges for the Ombudsman in a Changing Socio-Economic Environment”.

The meeting of the Board of Directors held last year in Manila arrived at this overall theme following discussion under the chairmanship of Mr. Malik, our President at that time. Mr Malik has been invited here as our Special Guest at this Conference. Building on the achievements of the previous Conference in Thailand in 2009, the Board came up with the following sub-themes for this new conference:

- Cross-generational challenges facing the Ombudsman, arising from a changing demographic structure;
- Fundamental rights of citizens pertaining to access to information;
- Improving advocacy and outreach strategies to protect vulnerable segments of society;
- The role of the Ombudsman in decentralization, out-sourcing and public private partnership;
- Identifying people’s concerns from the daily flow of complaints, and contributing to systemic improvements.

The themes we are going to discuss are very timely in the circumstances to which I have referred. Big natural disasters, which many member countries have also experienced in recent years, can of themselves trigger socio-economic changes. It is my hope that this Conference will provide plenty of opportunity for us to exchange useful views, ideas and experience which will influence our future activity as well as our present work. The targets of Ombudsman activity can be defined as including not only protection of people from maladministration or violation of their rights in present time now, but also as contributing to ‘good governance’ for the future.

Before introducing our keynote speakers, I'd like to make a brief introduction to this city, Numazu in Shizuoka. This Conference has come together thanks to the especial help of the people of Numazu City and Shizuoka Prefecture, so on everyone's behalf gathered here today I would like to express our heartfelt appreciation to them for hosting us so comfortably and efficiently.

Numazu City is located in the eastern part of Shizuoka prefecture, at the foot of Mt. Fuji and benefits from the special mountain's beautiful spring water. It enjoys a mild climate and abundance of delicious food products issuing from the surrounding fertile farmland and the ocean. Being a medium-sized Japanese city it differs greatly in character and atmosphere both from the world-famous, gigantic megalopolis of Tokyo and the historic city of Kyoto, further south. Yet as such Numazu has its own charms, so I hope participants in this conference regard this as an opportunity to experience part of the 'real Japan'.

Ladies and Gentlemen, at this point it is my honor to invite Ms. Conchita Carpio Morales, the Acting President of Asian Ombudsman Association, and Ms. Beverley Wakem, the President of International Ombudsman Institute to deliver the Keynote speeches at this Conference.

Thank you very much.