



NEWSLETTER

Japan International Labour Foundation

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POSITIVE Conference and Plant-Level Seminars held in Bangladesh

Nationwide POSITIVE activities on OSH in Bangladesh

Since FY1996, JILAF has conducted educational activities for workers in Bangladesh with ICFTU-Bangladesh Council (ICFTU-BC), which comprises ICFTU-affiliated national centers in the country. "Occupational Safety and Health (OSH)" was one of the areas where we had received strong requests from them from the beginning, and the POSITIVE programme, which aims to promote action-oriented training in OSH by trade union initiatives, was introduced in Bangladesh in March 1997. Eight national seminars and over 110 plant-level seminars have been held since then, resulting in nurturing a lot of trainers who are now very active throughout Bangladesh.

Future activity policies drawn up at POSITIVE Conference

This was the first conference on OSH at which POSITIVE trainers from all over



▲ Participants renew their resolution to "strive with solidarity"

Bangladesh gathered under one roof to exchange experiences and draw up policies for future activities. It was held on March 8-9, 2002 in the capital city, Dhaka.

The POSITIVE Conference was attended by 133 trainers, as well as such leading figures as the Bangladesh Minister for Environment and Forestry and the President of Bangladesh Employers Federation. It was a flourishing affair. After a presentation on "POSITIVE Activities in Asia" by Mr. Naoki Toyama of Tokyo Occupational Safety and Health Center, the trainers reviewed their OSH activities up to the present, and made up a future action plan utilizing their experiences. Heated debate continued late into the night of the first day.

The OSH activity policies proposed by the trainers included the establishment of OSH committees at plant, regional, and national levels, alliances with NGOs, and the establishment of an autonomous institute for OSH. These policies were unanimously confirmed among themselves including leaders of the member organizations of ICFTU-BC. The conference came to a close with all members giving "three cheers" in their resolution to "strive with solidarity" toward even stronger efforts.

POSITIVE plant-level seminars

ICFTU-BC promotes site-level OSH activities, with the aim of expanding to the workers in each workplace by local trainers who have received training at national POSITIVE seminars. In FY2001, 24 plant-level POSITIVE seminars were held throughout Bangladesh, and Mr. Toyama and a JILAF staff had the opportunity to attend one of them.

The seminar was held at the TSP Sramik Karmachari Union (TSPSKU) office of a fertilizer plant in Bangladesh's second largest city, Chittagong. General Secretary M. Kamal Uddin of TSPSKU, who was a participant of the national POSITIVE seminar in July 2000, was present as a trainer.

Plant-level seminars have been reorganized to enable the original four-day programme to be efficiently studied in two days. The seminar at TSPSKU began with a tour to the plant of TSP Complex Ltd. When OSH aspects are inspected using a checklist, a large number of new discoveries are made even in the workplaces where the participants usually work. After the Checklist Exercise, Brother Kamal conducted most of the sessions with the support from Mr. Toyama and Education and Research Secretary Md. Kamrul Islam of BMSF (a member organization of ICFTU-BC). Although it was his first time to conduct as a lecturer, Brother Kamal well versed in the POSITIVE content ran the sessions very smoothly. Group discussions became enthusiastic as the programme progressed, and in the final session, improvement proposals for the management were proposed in a positive manner. The management was also cooperative with re-

gard to POSITIVE activities, and we firmly believe that numerous improvements



▲ Previous seminar trainee working as a trainer (at plant-level seminar)

will be made at this plant in the near future through cooperation between labour and management.

POSITIVE activities - Hopes for future development

Prior to the POSITIVE Conference and the plant-level seminar in Chittagong, Mr. Toyama and the JILAF staff visited a sanitary ware factory where a POSITIVE seminar was held in the past. Examples of improvements were visible throughout the factory. It was clear that workers, with the lead of local POSITIVE trainers, had made concerted efforts to improve safety and health. It is said that there are innumerable workplaces throughout Bangladesh where POSITIVE activities have succeeded in this way.

One factor behind such success is understanding and cooperation for POSITIVE activities from the leaders and education secretaries of member organizations of ICFTU-BC. They recognize the importance of OSH and consider POSITIVE to be essential in carrying out improvement activities. Coordination among the education secretaries from each organization is splendid, and it is hard to believe that the people involved belong to different national centers. Conflicting opinions may arise at times, but issues are discussed until a consensus is reached, and an attitude of "let's come up with a better solution together" is evident.

ICFTU-BC's POSITIVE activities, which have reached the five-year mark, have progressed to their second step through the recent Conference. We are looking forward to observing future developments.

ICFTU-APRO/JILAF Regional Seminar of Women Trade Unionists Held

On March 26-29, 2002, the ICFTU-APRO/JILAF joint Asian Seminar of Women Trade Unionists was held in Singapore to discuss the working conditions of women workers in the Asia-Pacific region.

JILAF holds a joint seminar with ICFTU-APRO each year in order to nurture young union leaders. This year's seminar was attended by 42 union leaders responsible for women's affairs – including three male leaders – representing trade unions in each part of the Asia-Pacific region, GUF, and related



▲ Group-work
Focusing on know-how for solving problems

organizations.

The Seminar had the following objectives: (1) to share information on women's working conditions in Asia and the Pacific; (2) to discuss and compare core labour standards, labour laws and practices; (3) to identify key areas for future action; and (4) to collect comprehensive data on the working conditions of women workers. Moreover, "proposing means to promote leadership by women" was added as a fifth objective during the Seminar, as it is another major issue common to each country.

The programme was very well organized and coordinated by ICFTU-APRO staff members. It was kicked off with a report analyzing the labour situation in the Asia-Pacific region, and included lectures that got right to the heart of the ILO conventions. Meanwhile, lectures on social safety nets and collective bargaining, information exchanges via country reports presented by participants, and

group-work and other presentations were featured during the programme. The Seminar offered ample opportunity for opinion sharing among all participants, as opposed to passive participation.

In the country reports, each participant gave a presentation focusing on the following four points: (1) problems being addressed by unions; (2) problem-solving initiatives that are succeeding; (3) initiatives by national centers; and (4) action plans. As mentioned by all participants during the opening remarks, in the labour movement, unfortunately, there are very few venues where labour issues related to women workers are actively taken up. Accordingly, the presentation provided an excellent opportunity to share information on each country's situation. Due to differences in circumstances/cultural aspects among the various countries, wage levels and maternity protection systems naturally vary somewhat, however there are also many common issues. For example, discrimination in terms of wages and job responsibilities, the scarcity of opportunities for women to participate in the labour movement, and the fact that unionization of the informal sector has not progressed, are major problems commonly shared by virtually all countries.

Based on the country reports, six problems deserving particular focus were selected during the group-work as labour issues in the Asia-Pacific region. They were; collective bargaining, unionization of the formal sector, unionization of the informal sector, employment-related discrimination, minimum wages, and wage gap-related discrimination. Each group engaged in brainstorming with regard to the above topics. The following day, each group gave a presentation concerning, 1) what the actual problems are, 2) how to tackle the problems, and 3) what can be done through APRO. The groups comprised

members from different countries, resulting in content that brought together ideas from each vantage point. During the Q&A session following the presentations, vigorous exchanges of viewpoints took place, resulting in even deeper exchanges of opinions.

On the final day of the four-day Seminar, members of a committee comprising representatives of the participants presented a resolution document, prepared in advance, on an overhead projector, and all participants carefully checked the content line by line. Many opinions were raised regarding the expressions used in the document, and the session lasted much longer than had been originally scheduled.



▲ Participants from each Asia-Pacific nation

As was mentioned by ICFTU-APRO staff members, there is such a wide range of labour issues in the Asia-Pacific region that it is difficult to home in on just a few topics. In particular, for labour issues related to women workers, despite the importance of the topic, there exist few venues even for information sharing. The Seminar was a "first step" toward solving this problem, and we earnestly hope that it will serve as an opportunity for initiatives – centered around the leaders who participated – to increase the number of workplaces where women workers in the Asia-Pacific region can do their jobs safely. JILAF also hopes to support future seminars of this kind, in ways that will enable such initiatives to take root among unions well into the future.

FROM JIMBOCHO

Keep Going, JILAF!

For some years now, I've written this "From Jimbocho" column. Its motif is "small discoveries," mainly during overseas travel, and I've written about 20 such pieces. This is the last time I'll be doing the column.

When I was appointed as Executive Director-General, the Japanese economic bubble burst, and JILAF has faced financial difficulties, due to decreasing interest rates and financial structural reforms of the governmental budget. For these reasons, I've had a lot of hard struggles, but more importantly, my work with JILAF has been enjoyable and meaningful.

I've met several hundred trade union leaders invited from abroad. One event that has left me

an impression even now was a visit by union representatives from Israel and Palestine, who were invited as a single team. Even though programme didn't go smoothly, both sides firmly believed that Peace Process would be achieved. I've also been warmly welcomed by countless people in almost all parts of the world. Even now, I can't forget the shining eyes of children at child-labour schools in Nepal and India. Also, the sound of the wind on the vast plains of Mongolia, and the faces of warmhearted people come to mind. My memories are inexhaustible.

That said, now JILAF once again faces difficulties, in the form of stagnant economic and critical governmental financial conditions, and structural

reform of public corporations. Nevertheless, based on my experiences, I can say that in this trade union's world "When one is really in difficulty, a helping hand will be extended." In fact, there are new signs of support for JILAF in view. Maybe it's due to my blood type (B), or my name (Yoichi, meaning "positive first"), but I've been told I'm overoptimistic about everything. Nevertheless, I'm convinced that JILAF's prospects, in the medium to long term, are very bright.

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to everyone, in Japan and abroad, for your support and cooperation, and to extend my best wishes for JILAF's future endeavors.

(Yoichi Yamada)

JILAF Well on Track

To my recollection, JILAF was formed in the year I completed my tenure of office at ICFTU-APRO and returned to Japan. Since then, JILAF's activities have grown steadily. JILAF has achieved outstanding results, and is highly regarded today both in Japan and abroad.

In particular, JILAF's cooperation activities with trade unions in developing countries in the occupational safety and health (OSH) field are worthy of attention. The POSITIVE (Participation-Oriented Safety Improvements by Trade Union Initiative) programme developed by JILAF for trade unions is to be highly regarded as its flagship. It has the virtue not only of being low-cost but proves to be highly effective in terms of achieving improvements in workplace safety and health. It is based on the ILO's principles with regard to safety and health as applied in WISE (Work Improvement in Small Enterprises), an OSH programme developed by the ILO.

In developing countries, as industrialization grows apace, the incidence of occupational accidents and diseases is on the increase, and cooperation in this field, on which workers' lives may depend, is extremely important. However, if one is to consider the present scope of donor-funded technical cooperation, at least with regard to occupational safety and health, it is evident that cooperation activities in this field are still not adequate. Under such circumstances, the POSITIVE programme, as JILAF's flagship, represents a valuable asset in the sphere of cooperation in developing countries, and I hope that it will become much more widespread. Moreover, it would be desirable for JILAF to develop similar programmes applicable to other labour and social issues as well.

In addition, strengthening JILAF's cooperation activities with trade unions in countries in transition to a market economy, such as Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Vietnam, China and Mongolia, is among the goals to be pursued. In such transitional economies, in line with new economic systems, the structure and functions of trade unions need to be reformed. Furthermore, there are many more priority issues in the countries, including the establishment of systems for labour-management relations with collective bargaining as the lynchpin, the development of appropriate labour laws, and responses to the privatization of state-owned enterprises. It is well known that JILAF has already started implementing national-level cooperation projects with trade unions in China, Mongolia and Vietnam, but for countries such as Cambodia and the Lao People's

PROFILE



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After serving as Deputy Director, ZENSEN International Affairs Bureau; Project Planner of ICFTU-APRO's Education and Planning Bureau; TWARO Secretary; Senior Workers' Activities Specialist, ILO Asia-Pacific Regional Office; appointed to present position in January 2002.

Democratic Republic where not many donor-funded projects are yet being implemented, it is important for JILAF to launch without delay cooperation projects targeting trade unions, and so enhance JILAF's presence in those countries.

Moreover, in East Timor, where a new nation is in the process of being constructed, and Afghanistan, where efforts to rebuild the nation have begun, it is hoped that JILAF will take the lead in medium- to long-term labour and social development projects, with the aim of developing trade unions.

In those nations, either those undergoing the transition to a market economy, or those in the process of construction or reconstruction, it is no doubt vital to cooperate with JICA in national-level projects as much as possible, particularly projects geared to social development.

Finally, it would be advisable to establish a system whereby retired trade union leaders are dispatched overseas as volunteers to assist the development of the trade union movement. JILAF has already been making use of the abundant expertise and experience of such leaders within its ongoing comprehensive range of programmes, which includes both an invitation programme for trade union leaders in developing countries as well as national-level activities, in their capacity as lecturers and coordinators. However, it is hoped that such leaders will be dispatched overseas for periods of two or three years to contribute to the development and strengthening of trade union movements in developing countries, in particular those in the process of transition to a market economy and those being constructed or reconstructed. In addition, it is important to request the Government to include "development of democratic trade union movements" among the portfolios covered by JICA's system of assigning specialists overseas.

JILAF 6th International Activists Training Course

Practical Study Aiming for the International Stage

Following the report in our last issue, here's an update from the students on their training.

"Practice English conversation." ZENSEN's Secretary-General Ochiai said that every time we met. "Sure," I thought, and studied on my own. Then talk of JILAF's international activists' training course arose, which led me to the present stage. During the course, I've experienced several forms of culture shock. One was "vocabulary." I thought I'd studied pretty hard, but I found I'd forgotten so much. My second problem was "hearing." I've always been poor at this, and people speak so quickly, I can't catch what they're saying. My third problem was – I'm embarrassed to admit it, but – I didn't know enough about Japan's political, eco-

nomic, and labour issues.

Perceiving my shock, our ZENSEN International Office provided the opportunity, separate from the course, for me to have a lunch meeting every Wednesday with Brother Leong Fook Kee (Assistant Secretary of TWARO, the Asian and Pacific organization of the International Textile, Garment, and Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF)). (We called it the E-Lunch.) It's in English, of course! On average, about 5-8 people attend and have a lively conversation (we get some funny looks from the other customers, but...). Brother Leong doesn't speak Japanese, but he understands it fairly well, so whenever I say something in broken English, he "gets" the meaning, and tells me the right way to say it, along with useful expressions. I've not yet made a break-

through, but in two months, I've made some progress! The reason I think so is that I've gradually become able to understand how his conversation is "put together," and anticipate what word is coming next. Also, I've gradually become able to ask questions of my own.

I think that, when studying on one's own, it's important to be determined to actually speak English, if only once a week. I very much appreciate what my organization has done, including the consideration regarding my work. On the other hand, there's also the pressure of people thinking "She'll become able to speak really well," but I'd like to continue having fun learning, helped by a suitable feeling of tension.

(Sachiko Nagai, ZENSEN)

Neighboring Countries Become Even Closer through the Trade Union Movement

Invitation of Korea / Hong Kong team: the last (15th) invitation team for FY2001

On February 14-17, 2002, JILAF invited three trade unionists from FKTU (Korea), and four from Hong Kong (two each from HKCTU and HKTUC respectively) to Japan. It has been three years since JILAF invited Hong Kong team in FY1998 last time. Originally, Korean team used to be composed of those from that country only. But with the idea that a joint team of Korea and Hong Kong might give a good opportunity for exchanging with each other, it was put into practice this time. Japan, Korea and Hong Kong share a lot of information through their media, but, as is well suggested by the expression "close but distant countries," mutual understanding is still insufficient, and reservations on the past experiences are still kept. Viewing the impressions expressed by the participants this time that "the negative idea which we had kept has melted away like snow", we keenly felt how immense the effect of direct contact with other people, even for a short time, is in bringing down barriers. It is certain that the common ground of being involved in trade union movement greatly contributed to cause the effect, and it has a very impor-

tant meaning that JILAF, since its establishment, has placed valuable significance upon exchanges with such organizations. The layer of snow covering these "close but distant countries" is likely to gradually melt away with lights from various quarters. Once again, we have become deeply aware that JILAF must continue such activities as to focus these lights to reach the snow. We would like to take this opportunity to express our heartfelt thanks to all those concerned, whose cooperation has been the sources of light. A detailed report from the team is available on our Web site.



▲ Visit to the home of RENGO Yamanashi's Vice Chairman
Conversation was enjoyed over cups of green tea

FY2002 Business Plan Compiled

JILAF's business plan for FY2002 has been compiled, and the original proposal was submitted at the 36th Meeting of Board of Directors and Councillors on May 24, 2002. In recent years, Japan's economic and financial situation has deteriorated, and as a result of declining income from fund management due to low interest rates, as well as cuts in ODA budget, we have been forced to curtail our operations. In FY2002, it appears that conditions surrounding our operational development will become even more severe.

With the progress of reforms of public service corporations and special corporate bodies, projects originally commissioned by the Japan Institute of Labour will be commissioned by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, and support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will also be changed to a different scheme. In conjunction with these developments, in our FY2002 budget we have been unable to avoid reductions in project income, such as wide-ranging revisions of our consignment expenses, and abolition of subsidies.

On the other hand, as economic globalization progresses, the necessity of international solidarity in the labour world is becoming even

more marked than before, and expectations by trade unions in developing countries, particularly regarding international cooperation by JILAF, are growing. In order to respond to such strong demand, for FY2002, rather than aiming to expand the scale of its operations, JILAF will enhance their quality. In other words, projects will be developed with priority given to more efficient and effective management of their content.

Our approach will be to proceed with reviews of content overall, and work toward more effective project management – in order of priority as much as possible – while striving to minimize the extent of reductions in scale. In addition, regarding ways of proceeding with individual projects, we will endeavor to achieve more appropriate project administration, aiming to introduce a rational evaluation system and improve and reorganize work manuals.

In order to open up opportunities for future expansion of projects, we would also like to strengthen our human and financial foundations, while deepening our links with international trade union organizations and institutions.

JILAF Calendar (March – May 2002)

1. Invitation Program

•South-East Asia Team
(May 30 to June 12)

2. Field Projects (Only those projects conducted by specialists sent from Japan)

•POSITIVE Conference and plant-level seminars in Bangladesh
(March 5 to 18)

•Nepal JICA Project Field Survey in Nepal

(March 20 to 31)

3. Conferences

•Board Meeting of Board of Directors and Councillors in Tokyo
(March 1, May 24)

•General Affair Committee Meeting in Tokyo (May 10)

•JILAF Project Advisor Meeting in Tokyo (March 18)

•ICFTU-APRO/JILAF Joint Women's Seminar in Singapore

(March 26 to 29)

4. Overseas Surveys

•JIFAF Study Group Meeting on International Labor Issues in Tokyo
(March 25)

•Dispatch of Teams for International Interchange; RENGO International Cooperation Center; Thai Project
(RENGO FAN)

(May 12 to 20)

Inside Out

I think one of the good things about Japan has four seasons. Through the temperature of the wind and the different flowers in each season, one senses the arrival of spring, summer, fall, and winter, and thinks, "It's already time for the school year to start," or "Soon I'll need to do that job." In such ways, I've been able to feel the changing of the seasons in daily life. But this year in Japan, things are a little different. Although in Tokyo, the cherry blossoms

"always" flower at the start of the school year in April, this year, they had already fallen by the end of March. At the start of April, I switched on the air conditioner, and hastened to find my T-shirts, without waiting for the conventional "clothing change" in June. Probably, some people visit Japan from overseas to enjoy the changes in season, but from now on, unfortunately, their hopes seem unlikely to be met. (I)