



Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development

NGO in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

11 July 2011

Mr. Naoto Kan
Prime Minister of Japan

We sincerely express our condolence to the people who have been affected by the triple disaster that hit the northeast of Japan on 11th March 2011 and has since caused so much suffering. We also express our solidarity to women who have been struggling to recover their lives and supporting those who need help.

We appreciate the relief efforts made by various authorities, institutions, organisations as well as individuals and groups from across the world. We welcome the recognition and efforts made by the Japanese government in addressing the specific vulnerability of women, particularly violence against women in post-disaster situations.

Yet, we are concerned about lack of clear policies and measures to promote women's participation in decision making for the mid and long term reconstruction and development process. We regret that the newly adopted basic law on reconstruction from the Great East Japan Earthquake does not recognise the importance of gender equality in the goals, principles and implementation of the reconstruction policies. We are concerned that there is only one woman of 16 members in the Reconstruction Design Council. The lack of special measures to increase women's participation in political and public life is also pointed out by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW/C/JPN/CO/6).

In current Japanese society, a society with traditional gender roles, more men are expected to be breadwinners in households while women are responsible for day-to-day care for family members and domestic work. In crisis situations such as post-disaster situations and during times of increasing risk of radiation contamination, the burden of domestic and care work is heavily carried by women. Regarding employment, more women than men tend to be employed as part-time or temporary workers in order to be flexible to attend to family needs. This situation deprives women from being economically independent and politically active. Particularly single mothers, physically challenged women and migrant women are more marginalised in society.

Women's vulnerability in disaster and post-disaster situations is socially constructed. Various forms of discrimination against women and traditional gender roles persist in every level of society. The lack of an enabling environment for women to participate in political and economic decision making continues to prevent women from contributing to a society which is more resilient to disaster and crises. The Preamble of the Convention on Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) says:

... the full and complete development of a country, the welfare of the world and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields,

The necessity of affirmative action to enable women to participate in decision making was advocated for by women who were affected by the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004 and women's NGOs. Encouraging women's leadership and advancing women as decision-makers for gender responsive recovery from crisis situations are identified in the Eight Point Agenda for practical, positive outcomes for girls and women in crisis which was endorsed by UNDP. Japan must demonstrate a good practice of promoting gender responsive disaster recovery from its lessons learnt as one of the disaster prone countries in the world. Diverse situations among women based on their economic situation, age, physical and mental abilities, civil status, language and ethnicity must be considered and addressed in a rights-based approach.

In order to ensure those, we urge the Government of Japan to:

- Promote women's experiences and knowledge and incorporate in any plans or policies for disaster recovery and mitigation;
- Ensure the principle and practice of gender equality exists not only at the programme and project level but also at institutional levels;
- Include women gender experts and women's groups who provide support to disaster-affected women and men in consultative processes and decision making particularly in the prefectural, municipal and town reconstruction councils;
- Ensure greater transparency and accountability in the planning process in consultation with grass-roots women's organisations;
- Ensure gender responsive budgeting and develop funding mechanisms directly accessible for women and women's groups to enable them to respond to women's diverse needs in recovery processes;
- Increase opportunities of employment and education for women and girls without discriminatory conditions and provide special measures to create enabling environments for women and girls to work and study;
- Collect gender disaggregate data on the impact of the disasters and make the data accessible to the public.

Endorsed by (24 organisations, networks and individuals in civil society):

Asia Pacific Network of Women
Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)
BAIYAH AG MAHMOM, SABAH (BORNEO) MALAYSIA
Bunn Rachana, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Center for Women's Global Leadership
Charter of Human Responsibilities (India)
Citizens' Commission for Human Development (CCHD) Pakistan

Executive committee of African Peace Network (APNET)
Farah Sevilla, GenderCC-Philippines
Flora Tristán, Peruvian Women's Center
Forum of women's NGOs of Kyrgyzstan
Fundamental Rights and Directive Principle Committee of Constituent, Nepal
GenderCC-Women for Climate Justice
Jakarta Legal Aid Institute (LBH Jakarta)
Jharkhand women's net work, India
Labour, Health and Human Rights Development Centre (Nigeria)
Luz Martinez, Managing Trustee, Isis International
Network of Women NGO's MonFemNet (Mongolia)
International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR)
Rashila Ramli, Malaysia
Rural Women's Association "Alga", Kyrgyzstan
S.K.Priya, Addl law Chambers, High Court, Chennai India
Dr. Sharifah Syahirah, Lecturer, University Technology MARA, Selangor Malaysia
Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF)