

To Our Readers

February 2005

It was 1985 when the government of Japan ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The following ten years saw the strengthening of women's movements fighting for a gender equal society against corporations, which sought cheap women's labor based on the gender division of labor amidst intensifying global competition. Some words explicitly articulating women's reality such as *Sekusyaku halasumento*, *Domesutikku baidensu*, and *Sutookingu* (sexual harassment, domestic violence, and stalking respectively), were shared among women beyond borders and redefined by the women's movement.

In this climate, women made a global network to strengthen solidarity and gathered in Beijing for the World Conference on Women in 1995. More than five thousand women participated in the Beijing conference from Japan. Those women revived passion for crucial issues from Beijing and greatly influenced the situation in Japan, such as gender inequality, women's empowerment, and in eliminating violence against women. The Beijing Platform for Action articulated the political goals of the governments demanded by the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, which was adopted in the Nairobi conference in 1985 and proposed the objectives and actions to be taken in 12 areas toward the gender equality. The Asia-Japan Women's Resource Center fully utilized the potential of IT and disseminated the Japanese-translated version of the draft for Beijing Platform for Action and took a central role in the awareness raising of gender equality.

The ten years following 1995 have been problematic. Although women who were empowered and encouraged in Beijing have been working toward a society where women's human rights and equality are respected, the movement itself was redirected into mere consciousness-raising by institutionalized women's centers. Women's actions for the elimination of violence against women were de-politicized in institutional policies under the term, "joint-gender participation," rather than gender equality. This even made the causes of gender discrimination unclear. Moreover, the global backlash against feminism has grown harsher and has set us back even further.

In facing neo-liberal globalization, with gender-inequality policies being practiced under the cover of the "war on terror," and the conservative backlash against us, how shall we reconstruct our movement? We must reevaluate the history of the women's movement, reaffirm our solidarity, and organize ourselves strategically for the future.

In this issue, we will examine the "joint-gender participation" policies and clarify the problems. In addition, we feature a special report on the issue of HIV/AIDS in Japan, which has been ignored from the point of view of women's human rights.

It has been 25 years since the birth of the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and 10 years since the Beijing Conference on Women. We shall make 2005 the year of making women's solidarity global.

Masayo Niwa
Board member