

**14<sup>th</sup> RENGO Biennial Convention**  
**Opening Remarks by RENGO President Nobuaki Koga**

6 October 2015

Good Morning to everyone assembled. To all the attendees from the nationwide affiliates, observers, advisors, related organization members, members of the media, thank you very much for your hard work.

As you can see, we have President of the Democratic Party of Japan, President Okada, here today, despite his busy schedule. Also, we have Minister Shiozaki, Minister for Health, Labour and Welfare, who will be speaking to us this afternoon. Also, as guests from overseas, we have Brother Wienen, ITUC Deputy General Secretary, Brother Suzuki, ITUC-AP General Secretary, Brother Evans, General Secretary of the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD (TUAC), Ms. Nishimoto, ILO Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, as well as representatives from 5 international organizations, 22 countries and regions, 30 organizations, 38 guests from around the world who are kind enough to have joined us this time in order to encourage us all.

Moreover we have here with us, from Council of Worker Welfare Associations Vice President Yamamoto, from the National Association of Labour Banks President Nakae, from the National Federation of Workers and Consumers Insurance Cooperatives, Managing Director Hara, from Zenrōsai Kyōkai, Managing Director Akutsu, and from the Japanese Confederation of Retired Persons President Abe.

To all the guests who have joined us, I would like to represent our organization in thanking you all from the bottom of my heart, and express our appreciation to you all by a round of applause from all who are attending today. Thank you very much.

I would like to begin by touching on the ordinary session of the Diet which closed at the end of last month. On this 70<sup>th</sup> year after the end of the Second World War, this session, which has become the longest since the end of the War, cast a dark shadow over the future of this country. Regarding the general political challenges we face, I would like to touch upon it later on. I would like to speak about two in particular.

First, regarding the detrimental Worker Dispatch Act. By not dealing with job stabilization and improvement of working conditions of the dispatched workers, deregulation which allows haphazard increases of dispatched workers, has been forcibly decided against despite many dissenting voices which, because the political situation being such whereby the ruling party holds the majority of the seats, is extremely disappointing. However, we must continue our thorough on-site inspections at the workplace and steadfastly through our actions toward revision of the law, and need to put an end to the further increase of dispatched workers who work under unstable and poor conditions as we continue to seek the improvement of the treatment of dispatched workers.

Another is the Security related bills. This began with the recent changes of the

interpretation of the constitution by the Abe administration. Many bills that have to do with the fundamentals of the nation are lumped together, wholesale. During the Diet deliberation, as the answers given during the Question session changed time and again, the judicial world continued to point out that what was being attempted was unconstitutional. Many in the nation could not remove their concerns and questions regarding these bills and it was natural to raise our voices across the nation that enactment ought not be rushed. Despite that, the ruling party did away with meticulous formation of agreement, the deliberations were lacking, and they used the power of numbers to push the bills through. The most important values of constitutionalism and democracy, had been cultivated from our past wrongdoing and sacrifices, were shaken from their very roots by this methodology employed by the ruling parties and cannot adequately be expressed as outrage. The people's trust in politics has been shattered and this needs to be taken seriously by not only the ruling parties, but by all Diet members.

At any rate, we must never forget what had taken place at the Diet. RENGO has, up until now, been engaging ourselves in a nationwide rally to put a stop to the deterioration of the workers' protective rules and have held numerous rallies, demonstrations, sit-ins in front of the Diet, and on August 23<sup>rd</sup>, surrounded the Diet with the slogan, "No! to the Abe administration!" and have engaged ourselves on various actions. We offer you all our heartfelt thanks for your cooperation throughout.

However our fight, including bringing an end to the deterioration of the Labour Standards Law, among others, will continue. As we look towards the continuing rolling attack against the Abe administration which continues to depend the gap between itself and workers and ordinary citizens, it is important for us to continue to join forces with one another.

Well, as you are well aware, I will be retiring from my post as President at the conclusion of this Convention. Four years as General Secretary, 6 as President, all together 13 years including Vice Presidency, I have been engaging myself in the mission of executing RENGO's movement. Without your collective guidance and support, I would not have been able to fulfill my duties. May I take this opportunity to thank you all, once again.

Therefore, as for this period's results and challenges, as well as future policies, May I entrust the report and recommendations to the General Secretary and at this opportunity, as my tenure comes to a conclusion, reflect upon the past decade or so and share with you the challenges as I see them and the way in which the RENGO movement would continue to proceed, as I wrap up my opening remarks.

Needless to say, RENGO has, from its very establishment over a quarter of a Century ago, against the backdrop of the literally dramatic transformations in society, economy, politics been calling for the paradigm shift in order to usher forth a fair and sustainable society, whilst at the same time, painting the picture of the society as it ought to be realized by continuing our movement.

Especially, RENGO's movement during the past 10 years or so had been one in which a

just society has been continuously pursued. It was 2003 when we received the final report from the RENGO Evaluation Committee, headed by the now departed Mr. Kouhei Nakabou. The report was a wake-up call stating, "has the labour movement simply become one in which the workers' interests are voiced, but does not evoke the sympathy of the people." Further the report points out, "We must awaken to the changes in society, move from only focusing on the solidarity of the union members, and take the bull by its horns and fight against absurdity, and need to metamorphosize itself into an organization in which all workers will literally be able to realize solidarity with one another."

Based on this, in 2007 RENGO established the "Center for Non-Regular Workers," and built the united front for non-regular workers through the participation of all affiliates at the Spring Labour Offensive and thereby made even clearer the deployment of our movement for all working people, be they non organized or non-regular workers. Also, toward a strengthened regional and local based movement which shows its face, we have been engaging ourselves in creating the support stance necessary for the resolution of issues that pertain to the daily lives of the workers through our alliances with the reorganized local councils, the National Association of Labour Banks, Zenrousai Kyoukai and the National Federation of Workers and Consumers Insurance Cooperatives, amongst others. We've also implemented the "No!" to inequalities. Let us create a secure society by bringing all working people into the RENGO Circle" campaign, and engaged ourselves, together with all of you, in the Spring Labour Offensive, Policy and System realization, and the further expansion of our organization.

During this time, Neoliberalism and Financial Capitalism sweeps across the world, and overt competition has ushered forth anxiety and mistrust, as well as crises in our local communities. The destination we were headed for was the 2008 World Financial Crisis. We at RENGO continued to appeal to the world that we needed to take charge towards a financial system in which societal fairness and security will be assured. This type of activity brought about the historical change in administrations.

Against that background, in the 2009 RENGO 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Project recommendations, it was pointed out that it was a requisite to strengthen the roles and functions of the national center in order that it may be able to fulfill the expectations of the society. Based on this, we established a major signpost in our RENGO movement, the society which we envision, "a secure society based on work."

In order to universally spread collective labour management relations, the "10 Million RENGO" realization plan was established, which serves as a common path. At headquarters, through the establishment of a dedicated organizing team, affiliates and local RENGO organizations have been promoting activities and the fruits of the efforts are evident in the numbers of organized members who were 8 million strong at the time of the establishment, which had dwindled to 6.6 million, has now increased to 6.82 million.

The fostering of leaders who will be responsible for the coming generation, and the efforts in labour education, have been kept at the forefront of our minds, as "RENGO

Graduate School" has begun classes this April thanks to the cooperation of Hosei University. The University's endowed courses, due to the efforts of the local RENGO unions as well, has been offered at 15 universities nationwide.

We must not forget March 11, 2011, that Great East Japan Earthquake and the relief and reconstruction support extended to the region and its inhabitants. The relief operations conducted by 35,000 union members who worked tirelessly as volunteers, the nationwide donation campaigns, what could be done for those who were steeped in hardship? RENGO came together when that question was asked and the efforts became one in which we transcended all boundaries. Even now, activities continue to assist the disaster stricken children of the region as well as support for the regions still dealing with natural disasters. The circle of activities continues to widen.

In this manner, we at RENGO continue to challenge ourselves to deal with various challenges, and the range of activities steadily grows. However, RENGO, even after a quarter of a Century, finds itself needing to face challenges yet still.

One of those has to do with to what extent each of the policies of the national center are being relayed to the officers who stand at the frontline and who are responsible for the movement at each of the workplaces and regions. I have had the opportunity, since January of last year, through the cooperation of the affiliates and local RENGO organizations, to repeatedly hold direct dialogues with young leaders and non-regular workers from across the nation. One of the comments often heard was, "RENGO's activities aren't adequately relayed to us." Of course, RENGO headquarters finds it necessary to use our wisdom to transmit our messages better. However, we are not able to immediately solve this problem just by doing that. The fundamentals need to be thoroughly shared with each organization, including, "why is this movement necessary to begin with?" as well as, "what is the significance of the efforts underway from the prospective of workplaces and regions?"

The second, to what extent are we able to transcend the notions of "our organization," "our company," "our industry?" Regrettably, we cannot help but say that we are still a work in progress. Of course, Labour-Management relations, negotiations, Consultative Mechanisms and such will continue to be important. On the other hand, after the bursting of the bubble economy, It is also true that the stance of Labour-Management, which continues to pursue the survival of "our organization," "our company," "our industry" is connected to the negative fallacies of composition be it social or economic disparities. It is true that the extent to which the effects of the tax system, social insurance and environment are felt goes above and beyond what it used to be. For the improvement in the way of working and the way of living we must go beyond the existing organizational framework and look toward regions and the international community and actively engage ourselves in order not to be left behind, no matter how correct our argument is.

Not only do the officers assembled here today, but also all the delegates, observers and each and every one of you, represent RENGO. The RENGO seen by the Non-Regular Workers, Non Organized Workers and the people of the local areas are representing our

each and every action. We would like to confirm with you that it is necessary for us to exemplify that each and every one of us is the face of RENGO.

Switching perspective to the future of the society and our trade union movement. The major challenges we face in the medium to long-term, as globalization becomes ever more ruthless, and as the society and economy matures, how is it that we will be able to secure societal sustainability, and how ought we best exercise our roles in the trade union movement?

Through globalization, people, things, money and information continue to fly across the world freely. On the other hand, disparity, poverty, ethnic issues, environmental and health issues, evince the fact that sustainability risks, in an instant, transcend borders to affect us all. Against this backdrop, we are asked how we would be able to control globalization to be fair. Macroeconomics, Employment, Labour, Environment, in various fields, on various levels, the weight of various actors' participation, and the process of the democratic formation of agreement are ever increasing. From this point of view, the role that the international trade union movement must fulfill is extremely major, continuing to make it necessary for us all to cooperate with like-minded trade unions and to actively participate and contribute to these processes.

On reflection, our country, is already finding itself in the midst of an ultra-aging society and decreasing population phenomena. We have no time to spare to establish stability in the areas of securing labor, finances and the stabilization of the social insurance system. In order to surmount these challenges, virtuous economic cycles, including overcoming deflation, and increasing personal income need to be fixed as we implement policies toward the realization of a participatory society. At the same time, we, ourselves, are being asked how we will take the initiative in reviewing the way in which we work and the treatment we receive.

For young people, women, the elderly, under fair treatment, to be able to work in an environment where they feel safe is a sustainable societal premise which must be fulfilled. However, we see now that Non-Regular Workers make up close to 40 percent of all workers and the current situation is such that over 11 million workers are earning less than 2 million yen a year. Poverty and disparity are not only economic issues. Society's stability and tolerance, the way that politics and democracy operates are also very much related to these risks. For the sake of the sustainable society, raising and supporting the minimum standard, correction of the disparities that exist are urgent challenges we must resolve. We at RENGO have continued to appeal for the establishment of the virtuous cycle which arises as a result of the increase in wages which gives rise to increased personal income. We have been working on the formation of the societal agreement. In order to put this into motion, in the 2016 Spring Labour Offensive, as well, as we deepen our considerations toward the raising of wages, the improvement of Non-Regular Workers' treatment, there is also the necessity to further promote the correction of the wage disparities between companies and between men and women. Regarding the determination of the prevailing wages in each of the regions, increase of minimum wage, and the invigoration of SMEs and local regions, we will continue with the "Local Forums" held during the 2015 Spring Labour Offensive and

believe that it is important to further deepen the understanding we've received in the local regions.

Long working hours also need to be corrected. This is a major challenge. Every year, just those cases we know of death from overwork and suicide from overwork number over 100 persons. Many people are suffering from mental and physical disorders. Of course, in order to protect lives and health, working hours need to be urgently reduced. Also, the realization of the manner of work whereby time for family and community activities is ensured is a condition which must be fulfilled in order that we might surmount the issues of the maturing economy, the declining birthrate and the rapidly aging society and the decreasing population. The realization of a society in which work-life balance is achieved, by providing working people the manner of working and the working conditions which suit each life stage – we find it necessary to have in-depth discussions and deeper engagements in these regards.

Also, technological innovation must be dealt with. Information communication technologies rapidly progresses. The application of IoT (the Internet of Things) and Artificial Intelligence is breathtaking, as well. On the other hand, the concern being pointed out is that technological innovation will bring about deterioration of employment. What is important is to figure out how to realize a human way of working and continue to breathe life into one's work. For that purpose, it is important to actively engage ourselves in the exchange of opinions with workers, including the way in which macro distribution ought to be.

At any rate, as maturation and declining population in the society continues, we need to minimize the disadvantages of these, and make use of the tail winds which blow, as we pursue sustainability in society. In that regard as well, the trade union movement, needs to understand the changing times, share a healthy sense of impending crisis, and make use of each of our wisdom, and we continue with our tireless efforts.

Regarding the political challenge, we are being asked how politics ought to be as we earnestly deal with the maturing society whilst at the same time, being questioned how we will face the political realities.

Since the administration change in 2012, in the Abe administration, the policy thought known as Neoliberalism which for a time seemed to have been suppressed, is once again rearing its head.

We especially need to watch out for the obsessive thinking which focuses on policies which deteriorate employment. The standpoint of viewing work as a way to products and costs, that is, the conquering of the maturing society, and the worsening of workers' protective rules which is incongruous with the notion of “a secure society based on work” must be absolutely confronted.

More than anything, in politics today, we are decisively lacking the stance to sincerely face differing opinions which I have just touched upon. Tripartism, an international standard, is being looked upon lightly as Workers' Protection Rules are deteriorating.

Even when we look at the operation of the Diet as the Security related bills were being considered, that much is clear. Politics does not exist to fulfill the interests and desires of the few. As differing opinions are respected, it ought to operate in a manner conducive to pursuing the interests of society at large. In a maturing society, the bearing of burdens is being sought, as opposed to a sharing of the ever growing pie. It is essential that various values are harmonized. Even if it takes great effort, we must discover the solutions by repeatedly conducting our earnest dialogue.

It is now, that we need politics that turn an ear to workers and citizens' voices. To that end, we must come together as a political force in order that a change in regime might be realized as we convert the status quo from the "one strong, many weak." It is true that the peoples' trust has not returned to the Democratic Party of Japan. However, the Democratic Party of Japan which stands on the side of citizens, taxpayers, consumers, working peoples must become the focal point for all opposition parties to band together. We have expectations of them that they will exercise their leadership in order to coalesce basic historical views, societal views and policy principles.

In order to transform the current political situation, next year's House of Councillors (Upper House) election is an important step. As touched upon earlier, politics is directly tied to our way of working and living. Even if one decides one is apathetic when it comes to politics, politics concerns us. To shake the pendulum of politics, voters exercise their votes. We must appeal to everyone about this. We must share the political challenges and their effects upon the workers, unionists, their families and communities and collect our strength and will in order to help our recommended candidates, including the 12 candidates from the proportional representation districts who represent us, in order that they will be victorious and put an end to the heavy-handed politics. We are also considering enfranchising those over 18 years of age and I would like to add that how we engage ourselves as trade unions in the political participation of young people is also an important challenge which we must meet.

One of the important perspectives for the RENGO movement is discovering new truths through scrutiny of the past. As a quarter Century has passed since the founding of the JTUC-RENGO, the passing of the baton is indeed taking place from older to younger generation. Do not seek to follow those who have come before you, but rather seek that which those who came before you sought." Without realizing it, beliefs are left behind, actions become routine, we need to be conscious of this lest our movement's vital force be weakened. The generation that will be the torch bearers of our RENGO movement, may they occasionally revisit our origins, may they awaken to our mission and role and for the sake of all working peoples and their happiness, may they recognize what ought to evolve, what ought to be preserved which is of utmost importance.

In future society, many challenges await us. In order to proceed with the resolution of challenges based upon an understanding of the workers' voices, it goes without saying, that we must convert the level of those organized, and tie this to a further heightening of or worker's say and actions.

The declining working age population, the organizing of Non-Regular Workers, challenges are piled up. At every point, our priority is to increase the number of our

brothers and sisters, and expand the circle of our movement. This is the basic function of our trade unions.

At the same time, In order to further enlarge the strong societal swell of our movement, it is also important to increase our alliances and collaboration with various organizations and individuals as "work" ties us together. To "work" is not to only pursue efficiency and productivity, not only a means of livelihood. By working, people become connected to people, a connection between the workplace and society is a means by which to solve challenges, it is a means by which to give birth to new values.

This leads to personal growth, promotes self-actualization, and, I believe, becomes the engine for heightening society's sustainability. Moreover, even if, for various difficulties, one finds oneself facing difficulties whilst working, one can continue to exercise autonomy in society with dignity, as one finds oneself supported by others and vice versa. That is why, as I've stated earlier, by transcending corporations, industries, and even the framework of oneself as a "worker," as someone who lives in society, through the links with various actors, we are expected to fulfill our responsibilities in society.

In conclusion, I'd like to touch upon two expressions. First, when the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred, one of the unionists from RENGO who volunteered said, "Even though it was an unfamiliar place, amongst unfamiliar faces, though I was anxious to jump in, because the RENGO flag was flying, I was able to feel at ease and participate." The RENGO flag has the power to connect people to people.

Another is the voice of a female worker whose dispatched worker contract was terminated who spoke up at a RENGO rally where we called for a stop to the deterioration of Worker Protection Rules. After she appealed to the thousands assembled about the harsh reality, she continued by saying, "However, RENGO is on my side." Right there by our side, are our brothers and sisters who, under this harsh environment that they find themselves in, espouse hope towards trade unions, towards RENGO. We hear their voices, we must answer their pleas.

We are each weak. That is why we must help one another.

Trade unions, and RENGO, confront the injustice in the workplace and in society. We are a collective that is made up of workers who promote our movement for the sake of all working people.

We must, once again, become aware of our mission and role. Let us all take action together.

The environment which surrounds us is not easy, by any means, however as we recognize the changes in society, let us revisit and recognize the origins of our movement. I expect from the bottom of my heart that we take that first step, once again, as we work towards receiving the support of all people in society.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.