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Local government and Human rights

Statement by Mr. Akira MAEDA
on behalf of the
Japanese Workers' Committee for Human Rights (JWCHR)

We welcome the Advisory Committee's report, A/HRC/27/59 whose paragraph 35 mentions that local authority should pay particular attention to the protection and promotion of the rights of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, such as persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities and other groups. It is regret that we can find incitement of discrimination against ethnic minorities in Japan as we can in other countries, and occurrence of such incitement is increasing during recent years in Japan. Hate speeches and discrimination are severely done against Korean residents in Japan whose ancestors are coming from North and South Korea as a result of colonization of them by the Japanese imperial army during war time. The reason we speak about this issue is because there is a fact that local public entities in Japan encourage and promote discrimination and intimidation of them.

Since 2013, many local governments such as Ikoma city, Sakai city, and Takatsuki city allowed groups, which made hate speeches against Korean minorities, to use public facilities. What these groups did in public facilities was holding events in public named "Comfort Women exhibition." It was to justify sexual violence by the Japanese Imperial Army during war and to insult victims of sexual slavery. It means they had events to deny historical fact through the event.

In May of 2013, Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recommended the Japanese government to stop hate speeches against "Comfort women." In July 2014, Human Rights Committee advised the government of Japan to prevent hate speeches.

In August 2014, Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination recommended it to penalize hate speeches. However, it did not follow these recommendations.

Because of that, local governments have lent public facilities to groups making hate speeches against "Comfort women." Human rights NGO have requested local governments not to do that. But most of the local authorities denied the NGOs' opinion on the ground that they should accept freedom of association and freedom of expression of the hatred groups.

As a result, news was circulated on the web site that informed holding gathering in public facilities to incite discrimination.

Local authorities have an obligation to prohibit racial and ethnic discrimination according to International Convention Eliminating Racial Discrimination. As stipulated in the 1st provision of article 2 of the convention, not only a member state but also its local governments need to accuse racial and ethnic discrimination and take policies eliminating it. Local authorities are requested to prohibit racial discrimination by any person, any groups or any organization and to stop hatred groups doing that.