

# **Comments on the role of workers' organisation in preventing and addressing contemporary forms of slavery**

**29 March 2024**

**Japanese Trade Union Confederation (JTUC-RENGO)**

As a Japanese trade union national center, RENGO states the role of trade unions concerning contemporary forms of slavery as follows.

## **1. Foreign workers**

As a Japanese trade union, one of the main issues we have identified is that relating to foreign workers in Japan. Whether or not they fall under “contemporary forms of slavery”, many issues have been raised from the perspective of human rights protection, RENGO has been working to improve them by drawing up policies, making requests to the government and submitting opinions to the International Labour Organisation (ILO). In addition, some RENGO-affiliated organisations (industrial federations) and local organisations provide labour consultation services and support for foreign workers.

Japan has ratified ILO Convention No. 29 (forced labour). When the government makes the annual report on the status of the implementation of the Convention, there is a tripartite exchange of views between the government, representatives of workers and employers, and RENGO also submitted observations. The ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Recommendations and Conventions (CEACR) has repeatedly pointed out the situation regarding foreign workers in Japan, in

particular the Foreign Technical Intern Training Programme. In the observations of the CEACR report published in February 2024, the following points were made:

“The Committee urges the Government to continue to take all necessary measures to ensure that technical training interns are adequately protected, including through capacity-building activities for law enforcement officers, effective inspection activities at receiving entities and accessible channels to report abusive situations, as well as prompt responses to such reports. The Committee requests the Government to provide information on the recommendations made in that regard by the Advisory Panel of Experts for the Ideal Form of the Technical Intern Training Programme and Specified Skilled Worker System in its final report, as well as on any follow-up actions implemented by the Government. The Committee further requests the Government to continue to provide information on the number and nature of the violations of the rights of technical training interns reported, the number of cases that have led to prosecutions and convictions, with an indication of the situations that gave rise to these convictions.”<sup>1</sup>

RENGO will continue to monitor the situation and any progress made, whether the government takes action in accordance with the ILO CEACR's observations.

## **2. Other issues related to people in vulnerable situations and at high risk of human rights violations**

The Japanese Ministry of Justice has identified 17 categories of major human rights challenges in Japan. They are as follows. (1) Women, (2) Children, (3) Elderly people, (4) People with disabilities, (5) *Buraku* discrimination (*Dowa* issue), (6) The Ainu people, (7) Foreigners, (8) Patients of infections, (9) Present and former Hansen's disease (also known internationally as leprosy), (10) People released

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[https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:13100:0::NO:13100:P13100\\_COMMENT\\_ID,P13100\\_COUNTRY\\_ID:4372915,102729:NO](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:13100:0::NO:13100:P13100_COMMENT_ID,P13100_COUNTRY_ID:4372915,102729:NO)

from prison after serving their sentence and their families, (11) Crime victims and their families, (12) Human rights violations on the internet, (13) Victims abducted by North Korean Authorities, (14) Homeless people, (15) Sexual minorities, (16) Trafficking in persons (Coercive Sexual Services and Labor), and (17) Human rights problems arising after an earthquake or other disaster.<sup>2</sup>

RENGO have also developed initiatives and policies to protect the human rights of people considered to be at high risk of human rights violations, such as women, youth, persons with disabilities, sexual minorities, elderly persons and workers in non-regular employment contracts (non-regular workers), in addition to foreign workers. Deliberations on legislation and policy on various issues relating to these people are conducted through the government's tripartite council, in which RENGO also participates as a worker representative. Some RENGO local organisations have called for an end to discrimination against indigenous people (Japan's indigenous people, the Ainu). In addition, depending on the issue, RENGO has issued joint declarations with employers' organisations (e.g. on non-regular workers), worked with civil society organisations specialising in human rights issues for specific categories of people (e.g. women and sexual minorities), or in *Dowa* issues, and with lawyers' organisations specialising in labour issues.

### **3. The links with Business and Human Rights**

Furthermore, in Japan, the government formulated the National Action Plan (NAP) on Business and

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.moj.go.jp/content/001412238.pdf>

Human Rights in 2020 in accordance with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.<sup>3</sup>

This includes the government's measures related to "contemporary forms of slavery". They range, for example, from respecting and protecting the rights of workers (including foreign workers and technical interns) and children (including trafficking in persons and sexual exploitation), addressing hate speech, persons with disabilities, women, sexual orientation and gender identity.

Government meetings (roundtable and working group meetings) have been set up to promote and implement the NAP, involving stakeholders such as RENGO, the business community, NGOs/NPOs, consumers and academia. Through these meetings, the implementation of government measures can be monitored, and necessary responses can be encouraged. RENGO will continue to play a role to this end. Furthermore, in August 2023, RENGO compiled the RENGO's views on Business and Human Rights.<sup>4</sup> In the document, RENGO reaffirms that creating a society where human rights are respected is an inherent social responsibility of RENGO, and then, the entire RENGO organisation will address human rights issues, including those that could be regarded as "contemporary forms of slavery".

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100173319.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.jtuc-rengo.org/updates/pdf/JTUC-RENGOs\\_Views\\_on\\_Business\\_and\\_Human\\_Rights.pdf?9557](http://www.jtuc-rengo.org/updates/pdf/JTUC-RENGOs_Views_on_Business_and_Human_Rights.pdf?9557)