

On December 2, 2007, JTUC-RENGO (Japanese Trade Union Confederation) and PSI (Public Services International) held a symposium entitled “World Water Challenges and Japanese Standpoints” at the Suginoi Palace in Beppu-shi, Oita Prefecture, as an official open event of the 1st Asia-Pacific Water Summit, with the participation of 200 people.

The first section of the symposium, organized by JTUC-RENGO, featured a report from the Summit steering committee; a lecture “On Japan’s Water Issues”; a report on the present state of waterworks issues, and a policy proposal from JTUC-RENGO. The participants forged a common recognition of the present situation and challenges involving water in Japan, achieved a deeper understanding of the significance of a Basic Water Law, and noted the importance of working together toward its legislation.

In the second section, sponsored by PSI, we shared PSI’s keynote proposal “Strengthen Public Water Systems for Quality Water Services”; a presentation by PSIRU (Public Services International Research Unit) “Public Public Partnership in the Water Sector”; reports on overseas cases by AGWWAS (Philippine Alliance of Government Workers in the Water Sector) on “Water Challenges for People – Centered Model” and by KPTU (Korean Federation of Public Service & Transportation Workers’ Union) on the “Problems of Water Privatization and Responses in Korea,” and a presentation on “Public Water Management in Japan” by NPO AM-Net (Advocacy and Monitoring Network on Sustainable Development). Through these presentations, we achieved deeper understanding of the current situation and possible solutions to global water issues focusing on the Asia Pacific region.

JTUC-RENGO and PSI, as organizers of this official open event of the 1st Asia-Pacific Water Summit, adopted the following declaration for the solution of the Japanese and global water problems:

1. All the people of the world should have equal and continuous access to safe drinking water and sanitation services. In achieving this, public waterworks have a very important role to play and must contribute to the achievement of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).
2. Water is a basic human right, not a commodity. All people should have access to high-quality public services, and waterworks should be provided as a public service under public management.
3. Governments, the ADB and other IFIs, and donors, should, in the formation of policies aimed at the solution of global water problems, guarantee the participation of all stakeholders in the decision-making process. We must build a new framework to promote dialogue with civil society, in a way that is not top down, but that is open to users, residents, trade unions, and others, under the principles of Transparency, Accountability and Participation (TAP). We encourage public-public partnerships and labour-management cooperation to improve public waterworks.
4. Japanese water supply entities have endeavored to supply “Clean, ample, and affordable water” based on the Water Supply Law, a piece of legislation guaranteeing the right to existence as prescribed in Article 25 of the Constitution. Under the principle of municipal management, the system has earned a solid reputation based on the stability of quality, quantity, and management. While overcoming problems that exist, we should continue to “provide safe water that is fit to drink” in the 21st century in consideration of the “Waterworks Vision,” a goal set by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare.
5. The provision of water and sanitation services in a safe and qualitatively and quantitatively stable way is the basis for peace, welfare, and local independence. Comprehensive water cycle management should be carried out to secure safe and stable water. We need to make efforts for the early realization of a Basic Water Law under the philosophy that “Water is common property” and “Water is a basic human right.”
6. In Japan, where nearly all people drink tap water, there is a need for the government, municipalities, and residents, as well as enterprises and organizations involved in waterworks, to deepen their partnerships for the public management of water and to use their experiences to contribute, as world front-runners, to national and international cooperation through public-public partnerships. Let us work for the establishment of self sustaining local water supply and sanitation systems based on the principle of “Public Ownership and Public Management.”

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