

Making the G8 Hokkaido Toyako Summit the Starting Point for the “Voyage” towards the  
Establishment of a Sustainable World  
= Statement for the Second Phase of 2008 Japan G8 Summit NGO Forum =

The annual summit of the Group of Eight leading industrialized nations (G8 Summit) for 2008 will be held at Lake Toya, Hokkaido in July 2008. Since the end of the Cold War, the G8 Summit (which is attended by the eight “leading industrialized countries” including Japan) has been an opportunity for policies on global issues to be discussed and where various promises are made to the people of the world. These global issues include poverty and the development of developing countries, countermeasures to infectious diseases, environmental problems such as climate change and humanitarian crises such as conflicts in various parts of the world.

Given the fact that the G8 Summit has a significant impact on people all over the world, it is the responsibility of the civil society of the G8 countries, particularly of the host country, to strive to reflect within the G8 policies the voices of the civil societies in the rest of the world, as well as ensuring that the G8 adopt good policies, improve inadequate policies and ensuring that they keep the promises that they have made to the people of the world. The 2008 Japan G8 Summit NGO Forum was established in January 2007 in order to fulfill this responsibility towards the G8 Hokkaido Toyako Summit (hereinafter called Toyako Summit). The Forum is the collective work of NGOs in Japan which work on various issues including poverty and the development of developing countries, health, education, environmental problems such as climate change and biodiversity, arms reduction and peace building, as well as human rights. More than 100 organizations now participate in the Forum.

This is the first time that the Japanese NGOs from different fields have come together to form a network to make policy recommendations and work for their realization at the G8 Summit. When we started working on the G8 Summit, the NGO Forum first collected ideas and learnt from the past activities of civil societies in Japan and in the rest of the world as well as developing our policies towards the G8, in three fields: poverty and development; environment; and peace and human rights. The results of this work are put together in the position papers produced by the respective units. Using the opportunity of the G8 Summit Heiligendamm in 2007, the Forum sent a delegation of many members to Germany and built cooperative relationships with various civil society networks overseas. It is also establishing collaborative relationships with various Japanese civil societies including the “G8 Summit Citizens’ Forum Hokkaido” which was established in the region where the 2008 G8 Summit will be held.

Through the activities of the past eight months, we have come to realize the following fact. Since 1975 when the first G7 Summit was held in Rambouillet in France, global political and economic structures led by Europe, US and Japan have been taken for granted. These structures have now come to a turning point. The G8 has been functioning as a body to coordinate global governance based on this assumed global structures. However, in recent years, other countries such as China, India and Brazil have emerged as new economic powers who are increasing their influence in the world economically and politically. This situation is shaking the traditional tri-polar structure, and the accompanying G8 system. The world is moving into an interregnum towards a new world system.

Typically, various contradictions arise or exacerbate during an interregnum as the existing system becomes dysfunctional. Indeed, we are presently faced with various challenges. Superpowers are now embroiled in the “fight against terror” which they themselves started. In spite of the decreasing number of armed conflicts, world military expenditure is growing and we are coming into an era of

militarization. Nuclear proliferation is progressing and the major powers are proceeding with military expansion plans, instead of fulfilling their responsibilities for arms reduction. The Global arms trade is resulting in the loss of huge numbers of lives in conflict areas. Under the name of “anti-terrorism measures”, a tendency to downplay human rights and democracy is prevailing and some countries in Asia are even experiencing frequent political killings. In addition, the international community has not been able to find a political solution to the unprecedented humanitarian crises which are occurring in Darfur, Sudan, in Somalia, etc.

Efforts to tackle the problems of world hunger and poverty have been progressing since the UN Millennium Assembly in 2000. However, the progress is slow and this delay will accumulate social and economic costs even bigger. The number of children who do not receive primary education reaches the total of 77 million in the world. Two thirds of these children are girls. Gender inequality in education is exposing women to exploitation and violence. In developing countries, the life of more than one woman per minute is being lost due to childbirth or pregnancy. Many women, girls and children are becoming the victims of human trafficking. More people are suffering from infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. The average life span in some of the countries in Southern Africa has fallen to the 30s and the entire region is facing catastrophe. The unfair economic and trade policies, which create poverty and inequality, are far from being corrected and are now even beginning to erode societies in developed countries in recent years.

The problem of climate change is beyond a solely environmental problem and has created a general crisis which is directly connected to the problems of poverty and development as well as being a threat to peace and human rights. Global warming caused by human activities is expected to progress at an accelerated pace. The countries to suffer first and hardest are poor developing countries rather than the developed countries that caused the climate change in the first place. The international efforts to tackle this problem started in 1990 and this resulted in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol. However, the United States, which is the world’s largest emitter of greenhouse gases, refused to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. The amount of greenhouse gas emissions keeps on increasing. Scientists around the world are warning that leaving the situation as it is will have an irreversible impact on the Earth’s ecosystems. We are increasingly threatened by disasters which are derived from climate change.

Faced with these situations, the G8 countries have not been able to fulfill their responsibilities concomitant with their level of power, obstructed by their pursuit of individual and collective vested interests. Looking at the future from the starting point of the interregnum, we cannot help but to be filled with horror when we realize the severity of the situation.

Where can we find the key to overcoming the problems we face in this interregnum and creating a better world for the environment and life on Earth? We believe that it lies in the solidarity among civil societies: because their pursuit for secured and expanded global public goods transcends national borders, without being swayed by short-term profits for the privileged few.

In this interregnum when business as usual no longer functions effectively to maintain the system, states and governments can no longer monopolize the political decision making processes; meanwhile, the various experiences and practices have been strengthening civil societies, which are now increasingly engaged in alternative policies formulation. Already civil society participation has become taken for granted by many governments and international institutions and this has produced good results. In the process towards the Toyako Summit, we hope that the relationship between states

and governments on the one hand and civil society on the other will become one of an equal nature based on constructive criticisms and complementarity, and that that relationship will become the driving force for the creation of a sustainable world. We need cooperation based on critical engagement and mutual challenge among the state, the private commercial sector and civil society reach our common goal: a peaceful world where all the people are freed from the threat of war, poverty, climate change and environmental destruction, human rights and dignity are guaranteed for all.

We invite people to consider the significance of the 2008 G8 Summit being held in Hokkaido, the land of the indigenous Ainu people. The global problems undermining the world, such as poverty, infectious diseases and climate change, have a common root in the domination and exploitation of the indigenous peoples with the brute force of the powerful. In September 2007, the United Nations adopted the "Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," aiming to make such negative practices things of the past. At the Toyako Summit, the G8 countries should also declare a farewell to such practices.

The word "Toya" means "lakeside" or "shore" in Ainu. In 2008, we must make the Toyako Summit a "guiding shore" for our voyage across the deep sea that is the global interregnum: the starting point for our journey towards a sustainable world with human rights and dignity, free of poverty, climate change and environmental destruction that are threatening the lives on Earth and the planet itself. We have less than a year to before the departure. To get ready, we, the 2008 Japan G8 Summit NGO Forum, have resolved to set out on this voyage as a network of civil societies of improved democracy, transparency and effectiveness. Welcome Aboard!