

# NWEC

## NEWSLETTER

A Biannual Publication of the National Women's Education Centre of Japan

### CHANGING SEX ROLES IN JAPAN

1985 marks the sixth year of the Women's Studies Course that aims at establishing interdisciplinary women's studies courses throughout Japan. Our first three years were spent getting out the word about the concepts underlying women's studies.

In 1983 we kicked off the second phase of the project, a three-year NWEC action programme. We hosted annual research conferences and courses, each of which drew up to 300 participants--scholars, teachers, officials, housewives, and others--who shared insights and opinions about problems affecting women's lives.

This latter phase focused on sex roles in Japan, and on the need for reappraisal and change. What follows are some of the conclusions that were reached through the research and coursework.

Sex roles are still rigid in modern Japan, and this limits women's opportunities to develop their abilities and make the major decisions that affect society. Men, too, are locked into place, prevented from sharing family life and responsibilities.

The women's studies courses and related research were eye-openers. We learned that there have been many dramatic changes in women's lives since World War II. Medical advances have brought contraceptive choices and eased the danger of childbirth--thus lengthening life ex-



*NWEC offers a broad array of conferences and seminars each year.*

pectancy. Consumer appliances and electronics have streamlined housework, adding leisure time to the housewife's day. A host of social and technological advances have expanded women's horizons, but sex roles are still far from fluid. While the number of women teaching at colleges and universities is increasing, for example, most of them teach only part-time or are untenured.

These conclusions led NWEC to discuss how sex roles are moulded, by looking at the main forces shaping our views--home, school, work, society, and culture.

The mother's attitude is primary. When mothers read bedtime stories to their children in which girls are gentle and boys are brave, they reinforce traditional attitudes. Home economics for girls and workshop classes for boys; clerical work for women and management posts for men; the mass media's pre-

sentation of women as clothes-horses and sexual objects--these are some of the ways society dresses feudal values and customs in more modern packaging.

Education bears the major burden for changing hidebound attitudes. Children must be educated to be individuals who are able to critically analyse their world. Each person's many roles--as worker, family member, and citizen--must be stressed. And excessive competition and the primacy of economic over social well-being must be devalued before roles can truly open up.

Course participants advocated some specific plans for achieving these aims, in the community, at work, and in the schools. Plans included publishing materials which promote establishing "new home economics" courses in the state schools for both boys and girls; creation of local women's studies centres; encouraging women to enter the fields of science and technology; recognizing the economic value of housework; and supporting university-level women's studies courses and local study of women's issues.

Women's studies in Japan is a new field, and much is left to do. We must conduct more basic research into sexual discrimination and the effects, on both men and women, of more fluid sex roles. NWEC is introducing participants from all walks of life to women's studies by adopting a personalized approach; increasingly, course content touches on the real problems and issues that participants face. That "real life" approach will underpin a new, exciting three-year series of courses, which is set to begin in 1986.

## NWEC ACTIVITIES

# FORGING INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION LINKS

The burnished autumn leaves of the surrounding countryside lent extra colour to the 1985 International Seminar on Women's Information and Communication Networks, which took place on October 29-31 at NWEC. The seminar was held to consider the international channels now providing information on women's issues and discuss ways to improve those links.

Five non-Japanese women, all experts in the field of women's information and communication, spoke at the seminar. They were: Anne S. Walker, Executive Director, International Women's

Tribune Center (U.S.); Virginia Green, Coordinator, Isis Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange (Switzerland); Hilde Albertini-Roth, Assistant Director, EC Information Office (Belgium); Helen Kolbe, Information Section Chief, Population Division, U.N. ESCAP (Thailand); and Mihye Roh, Research Fellow, Korean Women's Development Institute (South Korea).

Four prominent Japanese--Yoko Naita of the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women; journalist Makiko Arima; Sophia University Professor Yoriko Meguro; and

the head of NWEC's Information and International Exchange Division, Yoshimori Suzuki--also took part, along with 80 auditors and a few foreign specialists.

The proceedings included three seminar sessions, a symposium--"Women in Tomorrow's World"--held before an audience of over 250, and an exhibition of 674 popular women's magazines from around the world.

The seminar's focus on networking underlined the importance of communicating information about women's activities at the grassroots level. News, perspectives, and information concerning women are the driving forces behind improving women's status around the world; that's why effective communication networks on the national, regional, and international level are vital.

# WOMEN'S GROUP LEADERS RAISE ISSUES

On October 15-17, 109 leaders of women's groups from every prefecture in Japan converged upon NWEC for a thought-provoking research seminar. It was held to examine the domestic impact of the United Nations Women's Decade and discuss ways of tackling remaining obstacles to sexual equality.

The group concluded that the Women's Decade has spurred a range of activities aimed at achieving its goals of equality, development, and peace. Women's groups have launched studies of sex roles, peace issues, and international understanding, and moved at the lo-



*Mayumi Moriyama, parliamentary vice minister and head delegate to Nairobi, addresses women's group leaders at NWEC.*

cal level for a broader role for women. Yet the lion's share of the knowledge gained through these studies has yet to be converted into action. The leaders attending the seminar established a liaison committee to coordinate the various groups' activities on a national scale, and vowed to renew their

efforts at the local level.

A highlight came on the first day, with an address by delegate Mayumi Moriyama about her experiences at the Nairobi conference, followed by a panel discussion among a prominent journalist, an administrator, and a researcher, on directions to take in decades to come.

# FAMILY EDUCATION LEADERS CONVENE IN SEMINAR

Social and economic trends have had a tremendous impact on the Japanese family in recent years, raising questions about evolving parental roles and child development. Since 1982, NWECC has invited local education officials, PTA leaders, and other experts in education and society to discuss these questions by sponsoring annual national seminars. The theme of our first three-year cycle was: "Family Education and the Evolving Family." On July 11-13 the Centre hosted the 1985 national seminar.

Seminar attendees discussed

topics related to the selected theme for 1985-1987: "Educating Our Children at Home for the Needs of the 21st Century." The participants divided into groups of 20 to discuss the current state of the family, working mothers, and parental responsibilities in educating their children. They contributed knowledge and success stories from their own experiences, and specialists in these areas added their findings. NWECC provided information on relevant government policies and parent education programmes. The seminar wrapped up with a symposium in



Family education leaders exchange data at NWECC seminar, which the specialists debated the selected issues.

The research meeting proved very useful for identifying future issues as well as current interests. Obviously, balancing the demands of family, work, and society, and deciding appropriate family roles for both parents, will continue to be vital issues in the years to come.

# FAMILY EDUCATION RESEARCH SEMINAR SURVEYS THE SCENE

That the Japanese family is changing is obvious to even the casual observer, but truly informed analysis of these changes requires statistical evidence. When the lack of a database for NWECC's Family Education Research Seminar series on working mothers became apparent, we set six researchers and a statistician, under the direction of Professor Hiroko Hara, to the task of conducting a comprehensive family education survey. The survey was held this year, the second of the three-year series. Funding is provided by a scientific research grant from the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture.

Hara's interdisciplinary survey targeted 1,500 Tokyo households with children aged 10-15, examining many facets of lives and attitudes. Respondents were asked their opinions on family life, education, and child-

raising. The results of the survey should provide some insights into current parent-child relationships, images of fatherhood, and the educational role of the community.

The survey was not our only research tool. In March 1985, NWECC hosted our second national seminar to discuss what roles

fathers can and do play in the family and the neighborhood. Several experts, including a psychologist researching fathers' roles, a physician treating troubled children in a child-care centre, and a government official concerned with female workforce issues, reported on their own research findings and discussed the issues.

The conclusions reached as a result of the national seminar and the Hara survey will be presented at the Second International Seminar on Family Education, which will be held at NWECC from September 29 to October 2, 1986.

## THE WHITE PAPER ON WORKING WOMEN

According to the Labour Ministry's 1985 *White Paper on Female Labour*, Japanese working women (23 million) outnumber non-employed women for the first time. The number of unemployed women who are counted

in the labour force is also on the rise. The resulting female unemployment rate of 2.8% is the highest in 30 years.

Compared to European and American women, it is evident that the lot of part-time women workers in Japan isn't easy. Part-timers work 15 more hours per week, on average, than their Western counterparts, and the gap between their salaries and those of full-time employees is greater than in the West.

NAIROBI SPECIAL SECTION

# JAPAN'S DELEGATES REPORT

Political friction is inevitable whenever 2,000 representatives of 157 nations convene. Nevertheless, the women's common concerns triumphed over their differences, and last July's Nairobi World Conference capping the United Nations Decade for Women ended with the unanimous adoption of *Forward-looking Strategies to the Year 2000*. This document, ratified at 4:30 a.m. on July 27 to joyous cheers and applause, sets forth an action plan for the next 15 years that builds on the progress the world's women made during the Decade.

The Japanese delegation was able to bring heartening news of such progress to the conference. Japan's National Plan of Action, adopted in response to the U.N. Decade for Women, prompted substantive change. It was spearheaded by the alliance of 48 women's organizations--variously active in civic, poli-

tical, or international causes--whose total membership encompasses some 25% of all Japanese women.

Ten of these groups maintained an information pipeline to the U.N. and other nations' women's movements, and spurred legislative reform to elevate the status of Japan's women. This legislation includes revision of the Civil Code and the Nationality Law, enactment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law, and ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

The Japanese government sent 27 delegates to the Nairobi conference; 13 women Diet members went along as consultants. What follows are a few comments by six of the Japanese delegates who spent July 10-27, 1985 in Nairobi, Kenya, helping to make history.

**Mayumi Moriyama, Parliamentary Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs. She led the Japanese delegation to Nairobi.**

*The day when mountains move has come at last:*

*I say, though none believe me, what I know.*

*Mountains that slumbered through the recent past*

*Were once, an immemorial time ago*

*Vast bulks of moving flame.*

*I hardly care if that be disbelieved.*

*But care I do*

*If this be doubted which I cannot prove.*

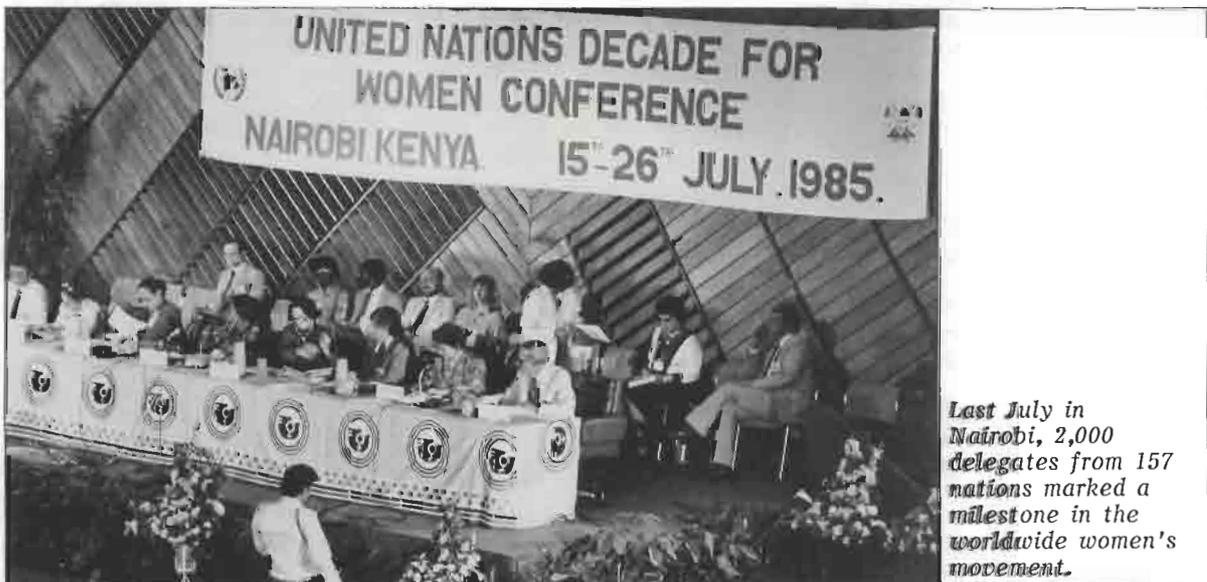
*But know, bone-deep, as true as bone is true:*

*That women, who once slept, are everywhere.*

*Now wide awake and, like the mountains, move.*

This poem, composed by Akiko Yosano 75 years ago, foresaw today's volcanic thrust towards elevating women's status. It was the U.N. Women's Decade that stirred these slumbering mountains.

Before the *Forward-looking Strategies* could be adopted, there was heated debate between



*Last July in Nairobi, 2,000 delegates from 157 nations marked a milestone in the worldwide women's movement.*



delegations over the inclusion of the words "imperialism," "colonialism," "apartheid," and "Zionism" to describe obstacles to women's progress. With the Kenyan president's submission of an amendment that replaced the word "Zionism" with "all other forms of racism and racial discrimination," the document was finally unanimously adopted, to deafening cheers and songs of joy.



The Nairobi gathering proved to be the most successful of the three conferences that punctuated the U.N. Decade for Women. It is now up to Japanese women--and all of Japan--to give life to the climate established in Nairobi by following up on past efforts and effecting new change by the year 2000.

**Yoko Nuita**, Representative, U.N. Commission on the Status of Women.

The most impressive outcome of the Nairobi conference was that the *Strategies* document was adopted unanimously. This consensus--achieved in the face of differences in politics, cultures, religions, and economic development levels--demonstrated women's common commitment to "a women's conference for women."

For the past few years, as representative to the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women,

I have witnessed the increasing empowerment of women delegates involved in policy-making as diplomats or specialists on women. This empowerment, I believe, resulted in the unanimous adoption of the *Strategies* in Nairobi.

The World Plan of Action passed at the Mexico World Conference ten years ago stressed women's role in policy-making. In Japan, women's participation in this area is still unsatisfactory because of the social convention of "women at home, men at work outside." Nevertheless, the last decade saw considerable achievements in legislation improving the status of women. I expect the future will see women speak out and



act on a more equal basis with men. Yet their activities should be accompanied by a feminist perspective. The next 15 years will see the turning point in Japanese women's endeavour to participate more fully in society.

**Ryoko Akamatsu**, Director-General, Women's Bureau, Labour Ministry.

For many years, the sound of the words "Nairobi conference" was a thrill for the people concerned. We weren't sure it would actually come off in Africa and in the closing year of the Decade, which had a special meaning, or if Japan would

really ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women before the opening. Fortunately, all went according to schedule. As a member of the Japanese delegation, I finally landed in the country of Kenya for the first time in my life.

In front of the Kenyatta In-



ternational Conference Centre on the opening day, I was much taken with the African women, dancing their joy in gay, multi-colored garb that seemed to be the symbol of their happiness.

For Japan and for me, the highlight of the First Committee meetings was that the Japanese representative--myself--was able to introduce a draft resolution on promotion of ratification of the Convention. All that long labour in Japan to ratify that Convention finally bore fruit on the stage of the World Conference.

The unanimous adoption of the *Forward-looking Strategies to the Year 2000* marks a milestone in world history and will last forever in our memory.

**Rinko Yamazaki**, President, Pan-Pacific and South East Asia Women's Association of Japan.

Although women's legal standing has been advanced in many countries over the past decade, true equality is still a long way off. In the developing



countries, the problem is compounded by the struggle to achieve the basics: adequate supplies of food and water, better health care, and access to family planning. Education is a basic requirement, too. The developed nations of the world must stand ready to lend a hand.

It was magnificent to see women overcome their differences to agree upon major *Strategies* addressing one common problem—raising the status of women. Now it will take patience, cooperation, and consciousness-raising to successfully implement the *Strategies*.



Research into employment equality issues is crucial. Women need options: part-time, flex-time, job-sharing, and home-based jobs that help balance the demands of home and workplace. Programmes that facilitate re-entry to the labour force through training and education are also needed. And men need to learn that making a happy home and raising healthy children are their responsibilities, too.

**Mizue Maeda, Director, Women's Education Division, Social Education Bureau, Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture.**

The *Forward-looking Strategies* document adopted at the Nairobi conference points out in the

first instance that overall progress has been modest during the Decade. However, since women's consciousness and expectations have been raised, it is important that this momentum not be lost.

Concerning *equality* in the field of education, the document states the importance of: promoting greater flexibility



peace education.

Most of the items proposed have already been identified and expressed in the World Plan of Action or the Japanese National Plan of Action. The real significance of the Nairobi conference lies in the fact that the world made the commitment to continue efforts towards achieving these goals during the next 15 years—by the year 2000. We still have a long way to go; I hope the day we reach our target will actually come.

**Kazuko Yokoh, Director, Planning Division, Health Service Bureau, Ministry of Health and Welfare.**



of sex roles in youth education; encouraging research into discriminatory practices in education and training; establishing women's studies courses at college and university levels; promoting positive images of women; and encouraging men to share family responsibility by means of textbooks and teaching materials.

Concerning *development*, the *Strategies* document stresses: women's participation in education policy; elimination of illiteracy by the year 2000; ensuring equal access at every educational level; reviewing curricula and materials to eliminate stereotyped sex roles; and promoting women's vocational education and training, especially that leading to non-traditional occupations.

In the area of *peace*, the document stresses the importance of the teaching of values such as tolerance, racial and sexual equality, understanding of others, and good neighbourliness through establishing

On the streets of Nairobi, I met women carrying their babies piggyback, just as Japanese do. By tradition, the Japanese people and the government are very supportive of small children. Japan's infant mortality rate is just 0.6%. Although governmental support over 40 years has inevitably been a factor, this low ratio could not have been accomplished without mothers' caring commitment to prenatal care.

However, as the industrialization of Japan continues and more women seek opportunities outside the home, I wonder whether the Japanese will still be able to provide their children with the same loving care.

# WOMEN'S GROUPS REPORT ON NAIROBI

## ABOUT JAUW

The Japanese Association of University Women (JAUW) is a member of the International University Women's Federation and the U.N.'s NGO Japan Women's Committee. The group was founded in 1946 to promote higher education for women, improve women's status, and boost international exchange and friendship. JAUW is Tokyo-based, with 31 branches nationwide, and a membership that totals 2,262 women.

## JAUW SURVEY IS BASIS OF NAIROBI SEMINAR

JAUW took advantage of the U.N. Decade for Women to survey members' attitudes about their status as women, their situations at home and in society, and their goals for the decade.

The results of this survey, "The Reality and Opinions of University-educated Japanese Women on Careers and Families," were presented at the Nairobi World Conference in a seminar that drew 100 attendees from 15 nations.

The survey revealed that Japanese women—even those with higher education—do not have long professional careers. Further, the percentage of women supporting the statement "women at home, men at work outside" was surprisingly high (JAUW members: 30%, Japan overall: 70%), as compared to Europe and the U.S. (10-15%). JAUW attributed these statistics to Japan's labour practices, social mores, education, and other factors.

Upon hearing this report, delegates from the U.S. and Australia asked what JAUW planned to do to counter these trends, and if "job-sharing" was a viable option. Delegates from Kenya and Tanzania wanted



*JAUW members share their survey on Japanese women's status today.*



to know if it was possible to live on the husband's salary alone; how high the unemployment rate was in Japan; the extent of men's participation in parenting; and how childcare and household chores were allocated. JAUW welcomed these queries, reflecting, as they did, the common concerns of women in different countries. We also appreciated participants' suggestions on how JAUW can help implement change in Japan.

## ABOUT IWEA

The Tokyo-based International Women's Education Association of Japan (IWEA) was founded in 1971 to encourage international friendship and contribute to women's education in Japan. The 700-member organization, with 20 branches throughout the country, maintains an international communications network, publishes reports, provides assistance for foreign students in Japan, sponsors study trips abroad for Japanese leaders, and more. IWEA also conducts three regional research seminars on women's education issues and one national seminar each year.

## THE EXPERTS DISCUSS THE ISSUES

IWEA fielded a 26-member delegation to participate in the Non-governmental Organization (NGO) Conference in Nairobi. Following the July 10 opening ceremonies, IWEA representatives led an exhibit/workshop on the lawn of the Nairobi University campus on July 11-12.

The display of posters, photographs, and brochures introduced Japan's culture and women's role in it as well as the ways Japanese women have changed in the past decade. The exhibit drew much interest, and IWEA was barraged with questions on Japan's education, employment, family, and women's issues.

While in Kenya, IWEA joined with women from many other nations—developed and developing, Western and Asian—to discuss common goals and problems. Opportunities to know heterogeneous cultures are rare for Japanese, who live on a small isolated island and share just one language. IWEA was thus grateful for the face-to-face international exchange afforded by Nairobi. By sending as many Japanese women overseas as possible, the IWEA hopes to foster the broad international perspective needed to elevate the status of women and solve the problems of the 21st Century as they arise.



*IWEA's exhibit was a colorful introduction to Japan's culture.*

## INTRODUCING NWEC

The National Women's Education Centre was founded in 1977 by Japan's Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture. The Centre's activities include:

Training for women in the form of seminars, lectures, group discussions, individual study projects, and other educational programmes. The Centre's comprehensive training facilities are available to any group whose subject matter relates to women's education.

Exchange of information among women's education leaders from Japan and overseas, as well as others who are interested in women's issues.

Information gathered and disseminated by NWEC's extensive libraries of printed and audio/visual materials.

Research of issues touching on women's and family education.



NWEC's facilities are comprehensive—and attractive.

Apart from NWEC-sponsored programmes, our facilities are available to women's groups and individuals for study programmes and cultural exchange free of charge (excluding meals and accommodation). To use our facilities, please complete and submit a NWEC application form no more than six months nor less than two weeks in advance.

NWEC welcomes your questions and comments.

NWEC Newsletter  
c/o Yoshimori Suzuki  
National Women's Education Centre  
728 Sugaya, Ranzan-machi,  
Hiki-gun, Saitama 355-02  
Japan

## PUBLICATIONS

# ENGLISH OFFERINGS ON JAPANESE WOMEN



**Attitudes of University Graduates toward Vocation and Family** (Japanese Association of University Women; Toyama Mansion 241, 7-17-18, Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 160 Japan; 1984; US\$3).

This book summarises a 1983 survey of 2,517 women university graduates on their attitudes about work and sex roles. The survey found that nearly 80% of women choose to work despite experiencing sexual discrimination on the job. Most women try to maintain a balance between work and home, with the majority opting for part-time employment. Obstacles to continuing work are housework, health, and raising children, in that order.

**A Short History of the Women's Movement in Modern Japan**, by Kazuko Tanaka (Femintern Press; Tokyo; 1977).

It's a little known fact that the women's movement has existed in Japan since the Meiji era (1868-1912). This booklet presents the history of the courageous Japanese women who fought legal and social obstacles to gain women's rights. Among those featured are the early Meiji reformers, influenced by imported Western democratic and Christian ideals; the "Blue-stocking" group of progressive young women who called for social reform in the years 1911-1916; pre-war women's labour

and pro-franchise movements; and post-war women's liberation activists. Although somewhat dated, this volume ably fills a gap in literary documentation of the Japanese women's movement.

**A Half Step Behind: Japanese Women of the '80s**, by Jane Condon (Dodd, Mead, & Company; New York; 1985; 319 pages; \$16.95).

Based on five years' living in Japan, extensive research, and interviews with some 200 Japanese women (and a few men, too), journalist Jane Condon has written a probing, engaging study of Japanese women today. In the interview sections, Japanese women reflect on their roles and attitudes vis-a-vis men, marriage, divorce, feminism, abortion, old age, education, and work. Speaking perhaps more frankly to a foreigner than they would to a Japanese interviewer, the women allow us revealing glimpses of their personal lives. In analysis sections, Condon conscientiously reminds readers that her perspective is that of an American professional woman who rails against many of the ills of Japanese women's lives—such as resigned subordination to men—but who also likes and respects her subjects for their strength and graciousness.