



## **'The UN Conference on Disarmament Issues was held in Shizuoka'**

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The 24th UN Conference on Disarmament Issues took place in the City of Shizuoka from 30 January to 1 February 2013. Hosted annually since 1989 by Japan and the UNRCPD, the conference aims to provide an informal setting for frank and open discussion of current critical issues of disarmament and security.

With the theme of 'Creating a Safe Future: Pressing Issues and Potential Solutions', speakers and participants addressed a number of current disarmament topics that were titled, such as Humanitarian Issues and Nuclear Weapons, Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones, The Current Situation and Challenges to the Nuclear Disarmament and Non-proliferation Regime, The Role of Civil Society, Nuclear Safety and Security, Small Arms and Light Weapon Control, and Disarmament and Non-proliferation Education. On the last day of the Conference, the Special Session 'World Student Peace Meeting' was organized by the university students in Shizuoka. The High School Peace Ambassador and the university students and the exchange students in Shizuoka also presented their peace and disarmament research during this special session.

More than 3,000 volunteers were involved in the 'Lights of Peace' project, and many side events were conducted in the City of Shizuoka. Wherever we visited in the City, everybody was aware of the UN Conference on Disarmament Issues and I felt the huge public motivation to contribute to the Conference as the Host City. Disarmament issues themselves may not be familiar to the general public. However, in Shizuoka interest was very high, and we were asked to provide observer seats over 10 times by the general public for each session. It just goes to show that discussions on disarmament issues are not only for the limited number of decision makers, but also for citizens themselves.

The 24th UN Conference strived to be as publicly inclusive as possible and, accordingly distributed the information about the discussions on the Internet. Even if people physically could not participate in the Conference, they could follow the debates through the live webcast, a live student blog, and a Facebook page, which was done in collaboration with UNIC Tokyo. These proved highly effective in mobilizing interest among the general public.

Alternatively, as suggested in the Session 'Disarmament and Non-proliferation Education', the importance of working closely with experts on disarmament and education issues could be a future topic for discussion, as they are always brimming with information.

UNRCPD is based in Kathmandu, Nepal, which may make you think the Himalayas (In fact, we could have a nice view of Himalayas during the sunny winter days). The other day, I had the chance to talk to a young Nepali in his 20's about Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He'd had volunteer experience with a UNICEF project and was interested in Japan. However, I was surprised to learn that he did not know that both cities had suffered from the atomic bombings. On the other hand, some Nepalese in their 30's and above were very familiar with the events at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Since Nepal was under the civil war from 1996 to 2006, it seems that depending on the opportunities for education, there may be a gap in consciousness in the people of Nepal.

This Conference also reaffirmed the significance of education. Please stay tuned to the UNRCPD's activities toward the next 25th Anniversary of the UN Conference on Disarmament Issues .