

The Global Article 9 Conference: Toward the Abolition of War

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While much of Japan was enjoying the extended holiday of Golden Week this year, supporters of Article 9, the war-renouncing clause of Japan's constitution, were hard at work. The first Global Article 9 Conference to Abolish War drew 15,000 people to its plenary session and concert outside of Tokyo on May 4th, while 7,000 gathered on May 5th to participate in a day of symposiums and workshops. The crowds far surpassed the expectations of the organizers, who hastily staged an ad hoc rally in a nearby park for several thousand people who were unable to get into the main arena on the first day.

An affiliated conference in Hiroshima on May 5th drew 1,100 participants, and on May 6th another large arena in Osaka was filled with 8,000 people while 2,500 attended a fourth conference in Sendai. Overall, organizers counted more than 30,000 admissions to the series of events.



The overflow crowd at the Global Article 9 Conference May 4th. All photos by Stacy Hughes, Peace Boat.

The Looming Threat to Article 9

The gatherings took place at a time when Article 9 faces the most serious threat of being abandoned since the postwar constitution was enacted in 1947. Prior to leaving office abruptly last September, then-Prime Minister Abe Shinzo—who

had made revising the constitution the paramount goal of his administration—pushed a bill through the Diet that provides for national referendums on constitutional changes. The law, which takes effect in May 2010, started the clock ticking toward a showdown.

With this date in mind, the revision camp formed the Diet Members Alliance to Establish a New Constitution in the spring of 2007 with the explicit goal of “placing constitutional revision on the political schedule.” The alliance now counts 239 current and former members of the Diet in its ranks. Although the overwhelming majority are Liberal Democratic Party members, the group includes 14 members from the opposition Democratic Party of Japan, including party secretary-general Hatoyama Yukio, vice-president Maehara Seiji, and supreme advisor Fujii Hirohisa.

The alliance held its own meeting in Tokyo on May 1, where Abe repeated his hallmark call to action: “The determination to write a constitution of our own is a spirit that will open up a new era.” Japanese conservatives deride the constitution as having been imposed on the country by the post-defeat US occupation, and (together with their present-day American allies) single out Article 9 as a constraint on Japan’s full participation in the strong and deepening military alliance with the US.

This constraint was dramatically highlighted on April 17, when the Nagoya High Court ruled that the dispatch of

Japan’s Air Self-Defense Force to Iraq violates Article 9. Transporting armed troops into a combat zone, the court ruled, constituted “the use of force as a means of settling international disputes,” which is explicitly renounced in Article 9. In essence, the court repudiated the government’s decades-long practice of “interpreting” the constitution to allow a steady expansion of the capacity and role of Japan’s armed forces within the framework of American power.

The unprecedented ruling, however, came in the text of the decision and carried no provision for enforcement. It thus left the status quo intact, and the government doggedly pledged to continue the mission to Iraq. Prime Minister Fukuda Yasuo declared, “I have no intention of doing anything in response.”



Partly in backlash against Japan’s first-ever dispatch of the SDF to an overseas combat zone, public support for Article 9 has revived from the postwar lows registered earlier in the decade. In a poll released by the liberal *Asahi Shimbun* on May 3, 66% of the public favored

retaining Article 9, while only 23% supported its revision. This represented a 17% increase in support for Article 9 over a similar poll conducted a year ago. Some polls show majorities in favor of amending other clauses of the constitution, but when the conservative *Yomiuri Shimbun* conducted its annual poll on the subject in March, it found that support for revision in general had also lost its plurality (42.5% for and 43.1% against) for the first time in 15 years, while revising Article 9 was opposed by a margin of 60% to 31%.

Article 9 on a Global Stage

This renewed support for Article 9 was evident in the spillover crowds that jammed the global conference to celebrate and advocate the renunciation of war. At the same time, the government's continuing efforts to eviscerate and evade the spirit and substance of the clause, the incongruous reality of Japan's powerful military forces, and the heavy presence of US military bases on the archipelago were never far from the center of discussion.

The conference aimed to reframe the debate over Article 9 by removing it from the narrow confines of domestic Japanese politics and placing it on an international stage. "The war in Iraq has demonstrated that even the strongest, largest army in the world cannot maintain peace in a single city, Baghdad," conference organizer Yoshioka Tatsuya noted in his opening remarks. "This tells us that peace cannot be achieved through aggression. The 21st century requires a

new system of values, and Article 9 can be Japan's contribution to the world."

The conference slogan was "The world has begun to choose Article 9," and numerous speakers pointed to the examples of Costa Rica and Panama, both of which have constitutions that prohibit standing armies, while more than 20 other, mostly smaller countries around the world likewise have no military forces. Bolivia has drafted a war-renunciation clause in its new constitution, though ratification has been placed on hold during that country's ongoing political crisis. Meanwhile, Ecuador has drafted an amendment to its constitution that would prohibit the basing of foreign troops on its soil.

"Article 9 continues to inspire many people throughout the world," declared keynote speaker Mairead Corrigan Maguire, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1976 for her efforts to end the conflict in Northern Ireland. "Many of us are concerned to know that there are those who wish to endanger such policies and abandon Japan's peace constitution. All peace-loving people must unite to oppose such a backward step."



Nobel Laureate Mairead Corrigan Maguire.

In another keynote speech laced with the refrain, “Now is the time to put an end to militarism,” Cora Weiss, American peace activist and president of the Hague Appeal for Peace, told the crowd, “I have come to help spread Article 9. Japan is not alone. You have support from around the world.” Suggesting that every time we type a Web address beginning www, we should think “world without war,” she encouraged each of the members of the audience to become Article 9 Ambassadors and to lobby lawmakers throughout the world to adopt war-renunciation clauses in their constitutions.

Stressing the costs of militarism to the environment, economic development, and human health and security, video messages to the conference were sent by Nobel Peace Prize laureates Wangari Muta Maathai, founder of the Green Belt Movement in Kenya, and Jody Williams of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines.



Former Iraqi and US soldiers, Kasim Turki and Aidan Delgado, with Nairobi Peace Initiative director Florence Mpaayei and conference organizer Yoshioka Tatsuya.

Among the 150-plus foreign guests attending from 40 countries and territories were soldiers who fought on opposite sides of the war in Iraq who spoke during a part of the plenary session devoted to “Creating a World without War.” Kasim Turki, now a humanitarian aid worker, was a member of the Iraqi Republican Guard when the war began in 2003. He has lost family members and friends to the war. “I was raised to believe that the military defends the people, but it did not. Nonviolence is the only way to defend people.” Aidan Delgado, a former US soldier who was sent to fight in Iraq, became a conscientious objector after witnessing the abuses at Abu Ghraib prison. “Article 9 is international,” he said. “I have decided to walk down the same path.”

Takato Nahoko, a young Japanese aid volunteer who was taken hostage while bringing emergency relief to Iraq in 2003, told the gathering that she believes she was freed and not executed because

she spoke at length with her captors about the Japanese constitution and her commitment to nonviolence. “While I would never wish that experience on anyone, it inspires me to think that Article 9 saved my life.”

Other speakers included Tsuchiya Kohken, former chair of the Japan Federation of Bar Associations; South Korean lawyer and human rights activist Lee Suk-tae; former US Army colonel and antiwar activist Ann Wright; and Beate Sirota Gordon, drafter of the equal rights clause of the Japanese Constitution. Gordon, now 84 and the only person involved in drafting the constitution still living, spoke in Japanese and told the gathering, “I believe Article 9 can be a model for the entire world.”

A Determined Effort to Broaden the Base

The Tokyo gatherings were held at the Makuhari Messe convention center in the city of Chiba, about an hour from downtown Tokyo. The choice of venue was something of a gamble, not only because of its large capacity and steep rental fee, but because the complex, which is best known for auto shows and trade expos, was unfamiliar territory for the peace movement.

The central organizers of the event were the Japanese NGO Peace Boat and the Japan Lawyers International Solidarity Association, who, since 2005, have spearheaded a campaign to promote the values of Article 9 on a global scale, as a concrete means of abolishing war (the

global campaign’s web site is [here](#)). Given the ambitious scope of the conference, they formed an organizing committee in January 2007 to plan and publicize the events. The committee eventually grew to include more than 60 civil society organizations. Signing on as co-initiators were 88 prominent individuals, led by the writer Ikeda Kayoko, author of *If the World Were a Village of 100 People*; playwright Inoue Hisashi; popular fashion critic Peeco; and director of the Japan Association of Corporate Executives (Keizai Doyukai) Shinagawa Masaji.

Mobilization for the conference was boosted by the steady growth of the Article 9 Association (A9A) movement. These grassroots associations, created throughout the country in response to a [2004 appeal by Nobel laureate Oe Kenzaburo and eight other prominent intellectuals](#), now number more than 7,000. Many of these individual groups (as well as more long-standing groups, such as the Peace Constitution League [9-joren]) were active participants in the global conference, although the A9A network itself has a strict policy of not endorsing activities outside of the network.

The A9A movement itself was launched in part to free the defense of Article 9 from the narrow confines of the opposition Socialist (now the Social Democratic Party) and Communist parties, which historically were the bastions of the peace constitution but have become increasingly marginalized in recent years. While activists from these parties have

been involved in forming some of the A9A groups, the movement has achieved a level of penetration that is unprecedented in the postwar history of Japanese citizens' organizations. Their advocacy and educational efforts are widely credited with swinging public opinion back to support for Article 9. This is despite the fact that mainstream Japanese media has paid very little attention to the movement, from its very inception.



International participants toast Article 9 at the opening reception.

Strategically, the global conference was an effort to shift the movement from simply defending Article 9 to positioning it as a proactive component of the international disarmament campaign. Japanese activists have drawn inspiration from the 1999 Hague Appeal for Peace, the largest international peace conference in history, which set an agenda for the new millennium under the slogan "It is Time to Abolish War." Article 9 has since been embraced by the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed

Conflict (GPPAC), an international network of NGOs formed in 2005 at the urging of former UN secretary general Kofi Annan. Serving as the regional secretariat for GPPAC Northeast Asia, Peace Boat has strengthened its links to many of the international activists who participated in the conference.

The conference also aimed to broaden the base of support for Article 9 among young people, and it was largely successful in this effort. The bedrock of support for Article 9 has traditionally been the generation that experienced the devastation and lack of political liberty during World War II, but with the aging of that generation, the movement to defend Article 9 has struggled to shake the image that it is out of step with the times. But the crowds that gathered at Makuhari were diverse, with heavy participation of people in their 20s and 30s.

Peace Boat, which has been organizing round-the-world peace cruises since 1983, is staffed by and oriented to young people, and the group provided the core of the organizing staff and volunteers. Artist Naruse Masahiro designed a coordinated set of images for the conference, including a charming character that was given the nickname "Kyûto-chan" (a pun on "cute" and "kyû," the Japanese word for "nine"). Naruse's son and other young animation artists created a [short film](#) that opened the conference.



A series of graphics, featuring “Kyûto-chan.”

One youth-centered event was an [Article 9 Peace Walk](#) from Hiroshima to Chiba that covered 750 miles in 69 days. Over 7,000 mostly young people participated in various legs of the walk, which culminated in a procession onto the stage during the conference plenary session.

Suzuki Michiru, a 29 year-old woman, started in Hiroshima with plans to walk for a week, but stayed with the march most of the way. Concerned about the environment, but never before interested in the constitution, she was drawn to the upbeat, free-spirited style of the walk: “I began to realize that Article 9 sustains

the small joys of our daily lives,” she said after finishing the trek. “We now have to make this Article 9 our own, and to defend it.”



The Article 9 Peace Walk arrives on stage May 4th.

Ash Woolson, a 6-year veteran of the US military and one of eleven who walked the entire route, told his fellow marchers about flashbacks of aiming his rifle at Iraqi children. “Nothing good comes from war,” he said. “People say Article 9 is idealistic, but why is it necessary kill each other?”

The first day’s events ended with a live concert, featuring the hit vocalist UA, veteran popular artists Harada Shinji and Kato Tokiko, and the up-and-coming trans-genre group Funkist, fronted by South African-Japanese vocalist Someya Saigo.

A boisterous web account of the Funkist performance reported, “Young and old, Japanese and foreigners, all perfect strangers, linked arms and rocked to the music. The arena became a tight unit and Makuhari Messe heated up. ‘My mother

is South African,’ Someya told the crowd, ‘and my father is Japanese. Under apartheid, I wouldn’t have been allowed to come into this world. But now the color of my skin doesn’t matter. We are at peace here tonight. Let’s spread the call for peace from this spot to the entire world.”

Asahi columnist Hayano Toru quoted a pregnant UA on stage: “As one woman, as a mother, as a human being, as a spirit born on this earth, I believe the day will come when we hear the news that all of the wars on this planet have ended.” “Despite the difficulty of their lives,” Hayano commented, “young people, in their own words and ideas, in their own songs, are trying to create a ‘solidarity of kindness.’” *Asahi* editorial board member Kokubo Takashi, in a separate column, commented on the “lithe and natural words and conduct of those who gathered at Makuhari Messe. The constitution’s Article 9 has spread its roots farther and deeper among young people than we political reporters who regularly cover the Diet would ever imagine.”

Facing the Challenges of Globalizing Article 9

While the mood of the first day was idealistic and celebratory, the second day of symposiums and workshops focused on the problems and prospects of moving toward a world where Article 9 might spread and indeed become the model for “peace without force” that its supporters envision. Sessions were devoted to world conflicts and nonviolence, Article 9 within Asia, peace and the environment, nuclear

weapons, and the crisis and future of Article 9. Additional panels focused on women’s involvement in peace-movement initiatives, lawyers’ efforts on six continents, globalization, and disarmament education.



The audience fills the hall for one of the conference symposiums.

The panel on Asia focused on the contradiction between Article 9 and the US military presence in Asia, in particular its deepening military alliance with Japan. Historian Kwon Heok Tae from Sungkonghoe University in Seoul embraced the “bright side” of Article 9, the model for demilitarization that has led him to establish an Article 9 network in South Korea. But he said it is equally important to acknowledge the “dark side” of the geopolitical context of Article 9: The rising danger of military confrontation in Asia, where all of the major countries have boosted defense spending while historical disputes fester. Article 9 is under attack, but even without revising the constitution, “Japan is a heavily armed nation,” through the combined might of the powerful Self-

Defense Force and the US military bases and nuclear weapons. “Why is this situation allowed to persist?” he asked.

Takasato Suzuyo of Okinawan Women Act Against Military Violence noted, “What shapes Japan today is not Article 9, but the US-Japan Security Treaty.” On Okinawa, that treaty is visible to the eye: 75% of US bases in Japan are concentrated on the small main island, many in close proximity to heavily populated cities. “On Okinawa,” she said, “the constitution is being violated every day.” She called for a redefinition of “national security,” to return it to a standard of actual self-defense, with a priority on addressing human needs and guaranteeing respect for human beings.

Joseph Gerson of the American Friends Service Committee pointed to the US strategy of encircling China. The structure of US bases and military presence has been diversified and bolstered, beginning with the stationing of missile defenses in Japan, renewed access to the Philippines and to Vietnamese ports, military cooperation with Indonesia, the continuing status of Australia as the “American sheriff,” and new US bases in Afghanistan and former Soviet republics. Marines are being moved to Guam in an effort to defuse opposition in Okinawa, but the US is seeking to build a new Marine base at Henoko, in the remote northern end of the island, while Guam itself is being transformed into a military hub. He noted that Japan has one of the world’s most advanced destroyer forces and is increasing its ability to project its military

forces overseas by obtaining in-flight refueling capacity for its air force and building a small aircraft carrier. “In fact,” Gerson noted, “the two Koreas see Japan as a greater threat than the US. At the same time, Washington and Tokyo have inflamed the North Korean threat, in an effort to change the cultural and ideological context they operate in.”

It remains true that, since Japan’s constitution was enacted, no human being has been killed under the right of belligerency of the Japanese state. Article 9, as a pledge to the people of Asia that Japan would never again engage in aggression, has also contributed to keeping peace in the region. But, Kwon pointed out, that peace has been “built on the sacrifice of the people of Okinawa and South Korea.” Within the context of the present system, he added, the fact that young people in Japan have no military obligation and the fact that young people in South Korea do “are not unconnected. The conclusion to be drawn from this, however, is not that Japan should reintroduce compulsory military service, but that Korea should eliminate it.”



Foreign and Japanese participants meet the press after the conference. From left to right: Kawasaki Akira (Organizing Committee Secretary General), Marte Hellema (Regional Coordinator of GPPAC), Jeanne Mirer (Secretary General of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers), Yoshioka Tatsuya (Organizing Committee Co-chair), Kathleen Sullivan (Disarmament Educator), Sister Filo Hirota (Mercedarian Missionaries of Berriz)

Conference participants drafted a [declaration](#), placing Article 9 in the context of a global disarmament agenda as well as a [statement](#) to the G8 countries that will be meeting in Japan next July. Plans are already being discussed for follow-up conferences, perhaps to be held in Costa Rica and elsewhere.

The success of the conference and the international attention focused on Article 9 generated strong enthusiasm and optimism. But for Japanese activists, it also placed in sharp focus the large gap between the potential of Article 9 and the reality shrouding Japan—and the work that remains to be done. After an international participant called for a campaign to award Article 9 a Nobel Peace Prize, conference co-chair Ikeda

Kayako responded in her closing remarks, “A Nobel Peace Prize? That’s out of the question. When I think of the actual situation of Article 9 in Japan, when I think of the US-Japan Security Treaty, when I think of Okinawa, all I feel is pain in my heart.”

Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution:

1) Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.

2) In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.

John Junkerman is an American documentary filmmaker and Japan Focus associate, living in Tokyo. His most recent film, “Japan’s Peace Constitution” (2005), won the Kinema Jumbo and Japan PEN Club best documentary awards. It is available in North America from First Run Icarus Films. He was a co-initiator of the Global Article 9 Conference to Abolish War. Japan Focus associate Douglas Lummis, another co-initiator, contributed to this report. Posted on May 25, 2008.