



BULLETIN

FIREFIGHTERS' AND AMBULANCE WORKERS' NETWORK

消防・救急労働者ネットワーク

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PSI Founding Conference of Asia Pacific Firefighters and Ambulance Workers Network



The founding conference of **“the Asia Pacific Firefighters and Ambulance Workers Network”** was held in Seoul, Korea on 2 and 3 October 2008. 39 people from Asia and Pacific, mainly from Korea and Japan, participated in the conference.

The conference was held at a meeting room on the ground of the National

Assembly of the Republic of Korea with Mr Katsuhiko Sato, Regional Secretary of PSI-Asia Pacific Regional Office, presiding over the discussion. The guest of honour was the Honourable Mr. Kwong Yong Gil, member of the National Assembly from the Democratic Labour Party of Korea. He told the conference that his party had presented a bill to the Assembly that grants the basic labour

rights to firefighters, and, taking advantage of this conference, he would struggle with PSI until the objective of winning the rights was achieved. This was followed by a welcome speech by Mr. Han Jung Ae, the Co-chair of the PSI East Asia sub-region. After a short self-introduction by all participants, Mr. Peter Waldorff, PSI General Secretary, gave a keynote address. He said that PSI was going to launch a network for firefighters in the future with a view to offering a platform where firefighters could learn about the common challenges and conduct activities together. He also said that PSI, with strength of its 20-million members, would make a strong appeal for firefighters to gain and ensure the basic labour rights.

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Next speaker was Mr. Tom de Meyer from the ILO Regional Office for Asia and Pacific in Bangkok. Mr. Meyer's presentation was entitled as "Trade Union Rights for Emergency Service Workers", and he focused on the ILO Conventions No. 87 as well as No. 98. A participant remarked that ILO had been issuing strong recommendations to both the Korean and the Japanese Governments on this issue and asked him what was the true reason why both governments have been ignoring the recommendations. Mr. Meyer replied that ILO's basic stance is to entrust the goodwill of a member government, but having said that, this approach has a certain limit as they can only continue a diplomatic dialogue courteously. He also added that, based on his experience of having contacted both governments several times, the exception to the Convention No. 87 was the army and the police. As regards the interpretation concerning the army, it depended on the respective government's choice while the definition of po-

lice is in a narrow sense and firefighters should be dealt with separately. According to him, both the Japanese and the Korean Governments interpret police in a wider sense, and, as a result, firefighters are needlessly restrained.

Mr. Peter Marshall from the United Firefighters Union of Australia, UFUA, which is not affiliated with PSI, explained that although firefighters in Australia had no right to strike, the other two were guaranteed. However, these rights were not given from the beginning, but were the result of the firefighters' struggle which had succeeded to spread the victory in one state gradually throughout the Federation. And they had now reached a union density of 98%, and, played an important role in the national union movement through many activities such as education and information-sharing among firefighters. As such, firefighters become an important force with a lot of political influence.

There were reports on the current

status of firefighters and emergency workers in Korea and Japan, which were summarised as workers without rights. In fact, this was the first opportunity in Korea that touched upon this problem, and 21 Korean firefighters and emergency workers at the conference listened to the reports with a keen interest. The country report also mentioned that approximately 8,000 firefighters and emergency workers out of 30,000 throughout Korea gathered two years ago and formed the Firefighters Development Symposium or FDS. FDS will work to gain rights, improve the working environment and conduct a survey on working conditions nationwide.

After the reports, the Declaration of Establishing the Firefighters and Emergency Workers Network (see annex) was adopted, and it was agreed that Zenshokyo of Japan would be the network coordinator.

Finally, many Korean firefighters and emergency workers made positive comments during the conference as well as the post-conference activities, such as "even though my identity will be known to the Korean security because of my participation at this seminar, it gave me tremendous courage and I feel encouraged. Setting up the network is good news," or "the Korean Government always mentions Japan as an excuse why they deny the basic labour rights of Korean firefighters. If firefighters of both countries can join hands through this network, we can and we want to be more active."

Constitutional Court denied the rights of organizing for firefighters



On 26 December 2008, the Constitutional Court in Korea denied the rights of organizing for the firefighters. This case was taken to the court by Korean Government Employees Union (KGEU). It also means that the amendment bill of the labor law for the public servants will not be passed. That bill was proposed by

Mr. Kwong Yong Gil and it requested the right to join the trade union for the firefighters of under the 6 grade.

Profile of Firefighters and Ambulance Workers Network Coordinator

The firefighters and ambulance workers network has appointed **Mr. Daisuke Yoshikawa** as a **Network Coordinator**. The Coordinator plays a crucial role to facilitate or coordinate activities for this network. The network organised forums/workshops and discuss all the issues related to firefighters and ambulance workers.

He is also responsible as the editor for the network electronic bulletin published quarterly.

Daisuke Yoshikawa was born in Japan on 1972. He is the firefighter for 13

years in Suzuka City, Japan. He said that his biggest dream is to operate Japan's greatest fire station with 300 various kinds of fire engine.



Daisuke Yoshikawa

He described his own character as *a fire fighting nut*, he cannot imagine himself in any other career but firefighter. He is Council Member of the **National Council of Japanese Firefighters and Ambulance Workers (ZENSHOKYO)** He is the fourth dan in Kendo. If you want to contact him, please send email through: dai-suke-yoshikawa@city.suzuka.lg.jp

Declaration of Establishing the Firefighters and Ambulance Workers Network

Firefighters and ambulance workers are the first to rush, whenever a fire breaks out, a natural disaster hits or an emergency occurs, to the site of disaster to give an emergency response before anyone else. They are working under harsh conditions all over the world. They are under constant pressure of risks, and are frequently deployed in emergencies and work long shifts. Their working environment, too, is often undemocratic, and a combination of these elements leads to tremendous psychological pressure, which sometimes claims victims when some workers put an end to their own lives.

Such circumstances must be changed and improved as soon as possible. To that end, workers need to be able to negotiate with employers on equal terms, which many firefighters and ambulance workers have not yet achieved. In many parts of the world, firefighters and ambulance workers are either deprived or substantially restricted of their right to negotiate, an essential prerequisite for working people.

Therefore, we first need to gain rights, which are simply just for any human being, the worker's rights. We demand the freedom of association as we believe that this right includes the rights of all workers to form a trade union, negotiate and strike. In this sense, this is a fundamental as well as universal human right, and, as such, is the foundation of democracy and development of any society.

The Declaration of Philadelphia, which clarified the objective of ILO, was adopted at the 26th General Conference of ILO in 1944. It declares, as one of the fundamental principles on which ILO is built, that "labour is not a commodity", and "freedom of expression and association are essential to sustained progress." Article 20 of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "everyone has the right to peaceful assembly and association."

Today, we gather here in Seoul, Korea, at a meeting to set up the PSI Asia Pacific Region's Firefighters and Ambulance Workers Network. We have affirmed that firefighters and ambulance workers in every country are working under very severe conditions, while the rights which are owed to them as workers are violated or deprived. We also affirm that it is we ourselves who can constitute a change to improve this state of affairs by working with fellow workers around the world. We believe that such solidarity multiplies workers' force into manifold.

With this, we declare that we establish today the PSI Asia Pacific Region's Firefighters and Ambulance Workers Network.

2 October 2008: All the participants at the launching conference of PSI Asia Pacific Region's Firefighters and Ambulance Workers Network



Public Services International is an official recognised non-government organisation for the public sector within the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and has consultative status with ECOSOC and observer status with other UN bodies as UNCTAD and UNESCO.

PSI Website: www.world-psi.org

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