

Questions and answers between Dr. Ogata and students

From the moderator:

Dr. Ogata's speech had many important implications. Once you enter a university, you should not think there is always a right answer somewhere. Or, if someone shows you a right answer so easily, you had better have an attitude of questioning it and find the right answer by yourself. I feel this is a very significant basic rule when you live in a university. In the Global Focus on Knowledge lectures this year, as the dean said at the beginning, the focus is on the sustainability viewed from society, which aims to demonstrate the relationship between the most advanced, cutting-edge academic research and society. This time's themes are "Academics and Society", and "Academics and Practice." In this sense as well, Dr. Ogata's speech includes many important points to consider. My specialty also lies in international relationship, and I am researching similar problems and issues which are pretty close to those researched by Dr. Ogata. Still, I agree with Dr. Ogata that it is really important for the young people to ponder questions by looking at the world widely as our own. Well, even if I had said the same thing, students would not have listened...; but, I think today's speech by Dr. Ogata, who has much experience in both academic and practical fields in international society, and plays a significant role in important Japanese organizations, must have reached to your heart more profoundly than a hundred of my speeches. Now, please raise your hands if you have questions or comments.

Q:

You were saying that the reception of refugees into our country is very limited, Japan is only looking at its people, but I think Japan should act more in international activities which may include a larger reception of refugees. I simply think the reception of refugees is good, but are there any demerits in doing that? I can't really think of them myself. I'll be happy if you could explain the differences in views about refugee reception between Japan and other more-positive nations.

Dr. Ogata:

Acceptance of refugees is really limited. One reason is the fact that Japan is an island country, and the culture is Japanese and the language is uniquely Japanese. When

10,000 Indochinese refugees were created, Japan accepted all of these refugees because of the international agreement which was concluded at that time. It was in the 1980s when Japan was positively processing the acceptance of refugees. After accepting those Indochinese refugees, Japan made tremendous efforts such as teaching Japanese to them. Japan was a member of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees which obligates Japan to investigate anyone claiming themselves as asylum-seekers, and its examination procedures were really severe. For example, refugees were asked if they had a certificate of graduation; but of course they did not have such papers because they had to flee from their countries as refugees. Due to such tight regulations, it was hard to get into Japan as a refugee, and it ended with one refugee a year sometimes. These days such regulations are getting abolished gradually; still, I think this is coming from, so to speak, the narrow-mindedness of an island country, where we have less compassion and warmth toward the outside world and different kinds of people. There is a kind of illusion among us that security can be ensured that way. People have believed that we can live safely in an island with one ethnic (which is actually not true) group of people.

Well, the acceptance of refugees is increasing to some extent; we accept some people as a way of humanitarian measures, and people who are not regarded precisely as refugees are also taken in from a humanitarian viewpoint. But here is the issue of foreign work force. Indeed, Japan needs a lot of labor from foreign countries, and they are now entering in a significant number. For example, there are 300,000 people from Brazil. It is because they are Nikkei and can easily obtain a working visa. However, Japan has not built any schools for their children, even if they live in Japan for a long time.

Under such insufficient circumstances, I strongly feel we need true democracy, which is not merely a system where someone stands for election and a leader selected, but one that shows considerations towards different kinds of people, weak people, and people in need. We should not “exclude” them but try to “include” them. I sincerely believe that Japanese prosperity will not come about unless we do it seriously. About refugees, I should have made more efforts while I was a member of UNHCR, as some people pointed out, but I was too busy helping people living under the governments that were malfunctioning. At that time, I thought some people would do something, because there were so many excellent people in Japan. But, when I returned, I found many problems within Japan...

Q:

You said that an intervention may produce a new conflict. You and your staff members were trying hard to protect people who were suffering under such circumstances, but do you think such an anxiety, an intervention produces a new conflict, has been solved?

Q:

You were talking about Yugoslavia's wars and said that people with various religions and races were living harmoniously, but they started to fight, and finally even neighbors faced each other with antagonism. In such cases, one party becomes an attacker and another becomes a victim; both parties are human as you said, but I don't know how such antagonism can be removed. And, I would like to ask about the acceptance of refugees; there are two ways of acceptance: before a conflict and after a conflict. This is difficult because it involves an issue of national sovereignty, but I wonder why it can not be solved in advance. I would like to hear your ideas on this.

Q:

There was an incident in 2004 where three Japanese were captured in Iraq, and I think some people believed that if everyone does something, the world would change for the better, for example everyone putting on a white wrist band or singing "We Are The World." Some Student NGOs whose members are very eager to change something are such an example. However, professional NGO members are not like students, and they have their own ideas and possess substantial resources. There is a wide gap between those two. As a student who wishes to become a member of the UN in the future, I would like to hear your suggestions on how to overcome such a gap.

Q:

You mentioned in today's speech that ODA from Japan is decreasing. From what I have heard, Japanese ODA is just supplying money, and Japanese enterprises get orders, or contracts for building something in these regions. So, ODA is used for the benefit of Japanese enterprises, and not really used for people in need in these regions. If this is true, does ODA, as a supplier of just money, make any difference in these regions?

Q:

I was studying at Harvard University this spring as an exchange student, and I felt strongly that I am Japanese. From that experience, when I think about the roles which Japan could play within international society, I personally regard as important that

Japan is a nation with experiences of being atom-bombed during World War II, and has an absolute determination of not owning atomic bombs. Also, we have been told from our childhood days that if we leave even one piece of rice in a bowl, we should apologize to the farmer who made it. We have been living in a nation in which we are told not to waste even the smallest amount of food. This cannot be well explained from an economic perspective. If there is lots of money, wasting food is not a big deal, because it is easily obtained again by new income. I personally think that Japanese international role should be based on such values. With this in mind, I'm concerned about how Japan can play various roles and assume leadership in international society. I also want to know what kind of stance a university student should have in this regard. Are you positive or negative about the future of Japan or the world? I would like to hear your honest ideas on this.

Dr. Ogata:

I'd like to answer from the first one. There is a question of how much prevention, which lets intervention be not necessary, can be made. I think development assistance is one of the really big instruments of prevention. Among them, of course, there are some development assistance which improves people's lives, but at the same time feed Japanese enterprises. I do not consider them as real development assistance. But when I go to developing nations, I see the differences between the rich who have much and the poor who do not have anything. Therefore, not all kinds of development assistance are welcomed, but the one to minimize unfairness in society is necessary. As I mentioned in my speech, if community building is completed, and if good communities are built, the reasons for conflict will surely be diminished. So, up till now the study of developmental economics did not go deeply into the issue of social injustice and prevention of conflicts, however, such research as political economy is expanding because we realize the solutions to political problems are linked with development assistance, some economic factors, etc. If development is one of the measures of prevention, we need to consider what kinds of development are useful for such prevention and what elements should be taken into account.

I remember that it was two years ago, when I participated in an UN High-level Panel on Peace and Security. We talked about what could contribute to the prevention of conflicts. And this includes not only development assistance, but also the reduction of nuclear weapons to prevent their further diffusion, solving a problem of trafficking of human

beings and other issues. Thus, preventative measures should be expanded in many forms. But what happens if we face sudden crisis for which those measures are not useful any longer. Then, we have to think about military action. The report presented some conditions for that, but unfortunately, they were not discussed in our country.

Now I come to the question of professional NGOs and student NGOs. When I was teaching at a university, students at that time held many campaigns, and fought for what they thought were right. I believe nowadays, instead of doing such demonstrations, there are many opportunities for you to state your opinions, and it is nice that these opinions will turn into NGO movements to reflect themselves. There used to be only a few NGOs in Japan. There was no NGO in Japan when I saw a refugee camp for the first time, which was on the Cambodia border in 1979. We have some NGO groups these days. NGO members with a variety of talents and skills are taking action now. Well, I think the gap you are feeling right now can be avoided by interacting with each other.

Talking about the roles Japan can play, or should play, this is best considered when you are abroad and look at your own country from outside. When I was studying abroad, I was researching the history of Japanese foreign policy for a while, and began wondering what Japan really is for the first time. With this question in mind, I studied it even more keenly. I think our country's experience of being atomic-bombed is also seriously important. If we keep living in Japan, we don't realize how precious our customs and values are. We never think about how important it is not to leave one piece of rice in a bowl. Parents keep telling those stories to children, so communication between generations is very important. When you are away from Japan, you will notice many things which you have never paid attention to before. So, I guess you have lots of opportunities to go abroad, please think about your own country and its people, and the roles your country can play in international society.

And one last thing and that is language. I think we should understand foreign languages. To be honest, I think we should improve our language skills. I was so surprised to hear from a Swedish person that in Sweden people used to study German before, but currently everyone speaks English, whose population is nine million in all; they study English from the fourth grade in elementary school. After all, in order to interact internationally we must have a good command of foreign languages; I believe language is very important as one of the tools of communications. When I went to China lately and lectured in English, I was very surprised that students in China asked me

questions in fluent English. So, we need to work hard and improve our foreign language skills for communication.

And one more thing, and that is Bosnia. In the Yugoslavia federation, there was a long history of the Serbs who were mostly farmers and mainly at the bottom of the society. In contrast, different ethnic groups existed from different currents of history. They wanted better political posts and positions when the federation was going to collapse. This couldn't happen if everyone had equal opportunities. Historically, there has been no fair-minded society. When history was going to crumble, they tried to protect themselves by becoming superior to others. And there is always politics at the bottom under various problems. So, I reviewed the days of UNHCR, and issued one retrospective book. As one conclusion I reached in that book, humanitarian assistance can help people under any circumstances, but it can not solve conflicts. They can be solved by political negotiations, diplomacy, and politics. Humanitarian assistance can and should facilitate these solutions. The influence of power is not insignificant. Politics is a study of power, power against power. I hope you understand it as what is happening in the real world.