

## **Leave No One Behind: Our Promise to the Children of Osaka**

"I don't see the point in living."

"What's the use in thinking about the future?"

"Nothing is going to change, anyway."

These are the voices of some children struggling to see hope in Osaka today.

The marketization of education has created an environment where a child's worth is determined by test scores and academic achievements alone.

Children are put up against each other in constant competition and ultimately categorized as winners or losers.

Adults, and especially children are oppressed by this toxic, high pressure environment. Children who do not excel academically are left behind.

Additionally, the strict homogeneity of Japanese society reinforces discrimination against those who are different. Strict standards set at school leave little room for exception and fuel a restrictive and exclusionary public mentality.

Children are robbed of opportunities to play and explore freely, of experiences that nurture curiosity and individuality.

Interactions with people beyond family and school are limited and children are left with very few opportunities to seek and build healthy relationships on their own.

Adults superficially preach that "Everyone is different and everyone is welcome," while in reality diversity is not tolerated and children's autonomy is not supported.

Regulations are set for the convenience of adults rather than in the best interest of children. Children are forced to follow such rules without question, instead of being allowed to think together and converse with adults.

Consequently, those who cannot adjust are excluded from society.

Children's issues are decided without their input.

Nobody lends an ear to children's voices and opinions.

Children are put in positions where they cannot display their talents and be themselves.

In the past, the rapid urbanization of Osaka resulted not only in a dramatic increase in its population, but also in the birth of many new children-related problems.

In response, Osaka established the first childcare schools in Japan, pioneered major movements in child abuse protection services, children's welfare and education, such as implementing free textbooks. Osaka is proud to have such an honorable history of citizens, donors, companies, and the government working together to build a safety net for its children. This legacy was built through the efforts of Osaka's citizens striving to protect each child, to see and support every child's unique capabilities, and to celebrate diversity.

However, today Osaka is becoming more and more divided and many children are falling out of their safety nets. A dark cloud of blame is cast upon those most in need; adults and children alike are controlled by the fallacy that those who fall through the cracks are responsible for their own problems, that they are struggling because they aren't trying hard enough. Sadly, these people and their struggles are hidden from the outside.

Within our horrendously inequitable current social structure, government spendings are allocated unfairly. Investments toward children are drastically cut. Children are mistreated and ignored. Are we doing enough to help children in need? Some children cannot be hopeful for the future unless we take action.

Thirty years have passed since the Children's Rights were adopted by the United Nations.

Let us remember again that the world has promised to protect the dignity of our children. They exist not only to be protected, but also to claim their own rights. They are not *future* adults. They exist in the *present*. They are members of our world and are our fellow citizens. We can not think of the present, much less our future, without these children. All the issues addressed in the SDGs apply not only to adults but also to children. Our children are an invaluable resource to transform the world into a better place. They are the ones who will solve our problems.

We hereby declare our resolution anew.

We will not leave any child alone.

We will not leave anyone behind.

Let us raise our voices to say "No!" and cause action when necessary to protect our children. Let us allow children to say no and listen to their voices. Let us collect our wisdom from all walks of life. Let us begin by conversing. By sharing with and listening carefully to one another, together our actions will surely bear fruit and we will open a new page for the next generation.

A generation in which we will not leave a single child behind.