

May Day Message from Mr.Rikio Kozu, President of JTUC-RENGO

- Protecting, Connecting, and Creating -

What is May Day?

This year's May Day in Japan is the 91st. As you can see here, May Day is in its 100th year, but it's the 91st. Why is that? There were years when May Day in Japan could not be held because of repression and war in the 100 years.

The fight against the spread of COVID-19, which is now plunging the world into the depths of anxiety, is said to be a kind of war. But there is a big difference. It is impossible to overcome this battle if countries confront with each other as in war. The world has to be in solidarity.

As we contemplate the history of 100 years, I would like to make a strong appeal for global unity, with colleagues in the ITUC from 163 countries around the world and all people celebrating May Day in each country.

Protect ourselves and all working people

The history of May Day is said to have originated in 1886 with a major rally of American workers who wanted to do something about the long working hours. The solidarity to protect ourselves and to protect the working people is the beginning in deed.

We have to protect the workers in the current crisis with the circle of solidarity and the power of solidarity. We are inundated with various inquiries every day for labour consultations at the RENGO headquarter, locals and affiliated organisations.

Many of those inquiries are by people in precarious working conditions that are not covered by the usual safety nets, such as fixed-term employment, contract work, temporary work, or ambiguous employment such as freelance work, in particular.

We must protect them with the power of solidarity. We need to make more requests to the government and administration.

On the other hand, there are people in the medical field who are struggling to engage in medical care while fighting the unseen risks of infection, as well as those who are extremely busy working in infrastructure, public services, logistics, and the supply of daily necessities. I would like to

express my heartfelt respect and gratitude. We must absolutely protect these people. We have to try to solve the problems in the labour-management relationship and in the workplace communication.

Connect each and every worker

Here, I would like to clarify a major issue. There are more than 80% of people in Japan who are not protected by the umbrella of trade unions, who are not involved in the functioning of labour-management relations. How much of a disadvantage is that to the worker? Isn't that now being exposed in this emergency situation?

Originally, the Japanese constitution guaranteed the three basic labour rights. The first of these is the "right to organise". We are all guaranteed the right to form a trade union. And the employer has to admit it and have a discussion with them. This is the right of every working person. We have to stay connected so that workers do not have to suffer alone. They are guaranteed that right.

There is no country in the world where the three basic labour rights are guaranteed in the constitution. We must not let it become a treasure trove. Let's stand together and stay connected.

Realise a society on workers and ordinary citizen basis

My sister and brothers.

I believe that social progress can only be achieved in a society where the voice of each and every worker is utilised and each and every one of them is valued. As for the contradictions in our society that are being revealed in this emergency situation, we, RENGO, are once again keenly aware of the importance of the safety net, which includes both for employment and livelihoods, that we have been advocating for a long time.

In the last 20 years, the precarious and underprivileged working conditions in Japan have increased dramatically amidst the prevalence of neoliberal policies and self-responsibility. During this time, it must be said that the government, labour, and employer should have joined forces to build a safety net.

We have come to this day without any reflection on the economic crisis in 2008. We must take the lead in creating human-centered policies and realising policies that are based on workers and ordinary citizen.

Both digital and analog (online and offline)

In order to realise this "Protecting, Connecting, and Creating," we must further enhance our ability to develop these activities in the digital world using online tools like this. We have to step into a world where trade union building is also possible online. And, on the other hand, let's reaffirm the goodness of offline.

Let us make sure that, in the near future, we will be able to overcome the threat of the novel coronavirus with our own strength and take back a world where we can literally go hand in hand. Imagining the joy of our predecessors who were liberated from oppression and war and regained their connection,

let's realise once again the goodness of analog and explode the joy of being able to stay connected.

This is the message for the 100th anniversary of May Day.

We are looking forward to working together with you all.