

Japan Should Raise Its Hand

By Hiroshi Kida*

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We initially began discussions about the United Nations University in Japan in 1964 — 21 years ago. I first heard about the concept of a United Nations international college or university when I was Deputy Director-General of the Japanese National Commission for UNESCO. One day an American lady by the name of Elizabeth Rose came to my office and told me about the idea of an international or United Nations University. She suggested that it was time for Japan to raise its hand at the UNESCO General Conference and invite the University to Tokyo; she said Japan would be a good place for such a university because here there could be exchange between West and East cultures.

Well — I was very surprised! It would not be the Japanese custom, particularly for those in government, to raise our hands at UNESCO conferences. But Mrs. Rose (who still lives in Denver, Colorado) was a very devoted supporter of UNESCO activities. And she backed up her support with her own private contribution of funds. So I asked Mr. Shigeharu Matsumoto, who was a member of the Council of the International House of Japan (and is now its Chairman), to organize a small discussion group about international universities. He invited Ichiro Nakayama of the Japan Institute of Labour, Tatsuo Morito, former Minister of Education, and Yoshinori Maeda, the former President of NHK, along with several other people, including Mrs. Rose.

Her idea was the establishment of an international school, a four-year college, open to students from all over the world, with an international faculty. But as we discussed this, we

realized that we were not all that ready to take such a step — because it would be a very difficult task to set up such an international university in Japan. Our discussions in this group went on over two or three years, and, in the end, our answer to Mrs. Rose was that it would be rather difficult for Japan to establish such a school. We recommended instead that, if one wanted to set up an international institution devoted to United Nations activities, it would be better to establish a research institution; from this base, we could develop an international network linking universities and institutions all over the world. With such a concept, we might be better able to open the doors of the Japanese academic community, which many people felt were closed to foreigners, to researchers and scholars from around the world. This is one of the reasons why I personally wanted the UNU to come to Japan.

I felt in particular that if a close relationship between the Japanese academic community and the UNU could be encouraged and stimulated, it might lead to more support from the Japanese Government to develop new kinds of international activities. That is why I promoted the idea of such closer liaison through my own ministry and through friends and contacts I had in other ministries. Frankly speaking, however, building this close relationship between the Japanese academics and the UNU remains something of a problem on which I believe the University will have to continue to focus attention in the future.

So this was the basic idea of our small study group at the International House. Mrs. Rose accepted this notion willingly, and she took me to meet Dr. Luther Harris Evans, the third Director-General of UNESCO, to present the Japanese case. She also travelled to many countries and met with academics to enlist support for her idea of setting up such an international university in Japan. During this time she also met U Thant. I am not aware of just precisely when the United Nations actually picked up the idea of the university. However, when U Thant proposed it a few years later, the Japanese side was ready to co-operate.

My own personal involvement resumed when I was the Director-General of the Bureau of Higher Education in the Ministry of Education. As a member of the government, I wanted very much to invite this new university to Tokyo. So we set out to persuade — in a rather official manner this time — a number of individuals in various ministries. We were also fortunate to have in office at that time as Prime Minister, Eisaku Sato, who subsequently won the Nobel Prize for Peace. Ultimately, he was the one who decided that it was time for Japan to raise its hand — and invite the United Nations University to Tokyo.

When the new Rector, Dr. Hester, arrived in Tokyo, along with Dr. Gaudry and Mr. Narasimhan, I welcomed them at the airport as the responsible staff member. We then began the co-operative effort to set up a temporary office and consider where the future campus of the UNU should be. I accompanied Dr. Hester as we visited various sites in Japan. I remember that he insisted that the headquarters should be in the centre of Tokyo, not in the suburbs. It was a very difficult task for the Japanese Government to find such a spot; the price of land in Tokyo is very expensive and we could not afford it! Finally, Governor Suzuki of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government made his offer of the precious land near here.

Once the University was set up, it was, of course, an autonomous international organization. So we had to negotiate with the United Nations about the Charter conditions for our supporting UNU. This would be an independent UN activity apart from the Japanese Government — so there were some difficult questions about the sort of relationship between the Japanese side and the United Nations side, particularly in reference to the role of the Japanese academic community.

As Director-General of the Higher Education Bureau of the Ministry of Education, I could understand that there was bound to be some conflicts and difficulties between the government sectors and the University. The UNU insisted on autonomy and we had to find ways to deal with the voluntary

and free ideas of the academic people in accordance with government regulations.

Despite all these difficulties, however, we still wanted to support the University's fund-raising efforts. I visited the Japanese Ambassador to the United States and we subsequently got the agreement of the President of the United States to support UNU. Unfortunately, the U.S. Congress did not share his attitude — and this cancelled out the President's support. It was a very sad day for us — as I am sure it was for Dr. Hester. So, from the very beginning, there were some miscalculations over fund-raising strategy.

I think, however, that, even with the shortage of funds, Rectors Hester and Soedjatmoko have been successful in developing the University's activities — under their leadership, we have seen UNU grow from a small baby to something of a maturing young person in its present stage. I very much hope that the next decade or so will see it grow into adulthood as a truly international university.