



NEWSLETTER

New start after finishing the "The Children's Meeting on the Holocaust '99"

Makoto Otsuka, *Director General of Holocaust Education Center, Japan*

"The Children's Meeting on the Holocaust '99" was a very special, meaningful opportunity for many children in Japan to learn about the history of the Holocaust.

Inviting a Holocaust survivor and historian, Dr. Yaffa Eliach from New York, the meeting presented various unique events. The most notable feature of the meeting was that it was organized by children, for children. They joined in the process of planning and preparation, and they shared the work from the presiding of the program to the reception and guiding in the hall. We believe the meeting was successful in terms of their ideas about creating an opportunity to think about peace and putting it into practice, which showed us great hope for the future.

Dr. Yaffa Eliach, with her dedication to the education of children, was a wonderful guest for the meeting. Listening to her story, I understood that she had experienced three kinds of the Holocaust in her childhood. The first one was in 1941, when the Nazi Einsatzgruppen attacked her hometown shtetl of Eishyshok and killed almost all the people there. The second one was by the Polish partisans. Her Mother and her baby brother were shot in front of her. The third experience was when her Father was taken by KGB to a forced labor camp in Siberia.

At the age of four she had to go through all these tragedies of the Holocaust, only because she was born Jewish.

With her experience, she established the first Holocaust Center in the United States. She also spent many years collecting photos of people who lived in Eishyshok from all around the globe, and restored them as the exhibition of the "Tower of Life" at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., which stands over 10 meters tall. Seventy photos from her shtetl collection were also presented by Dr. Eliach to the Holocaust Education Center here in Japan, on its dedication four years ago, and are exhibited in the memorial room just

the same way as they are in the museum in Washington D.C.. The display gives the deepest impression to the visitors here.

Professor Eliach has a big dream for the near future. It is to reproduce a life-size replica of the shtetl Eishyshok in

Hadera, Israel. She is hoping that it would also be a center for the research of the Jewish shtetls which once existed in Eastern Europe before the Holocaust.

Her way of living and the splendid hope she has towards the future, appear to us as the dream and hope which one and a half million children who perished in the Holocaust wanted to achieve.

During the meeting, the tragedy Dr. Eliach had experienced was put in a play and performed by children. It also included various events such as the singing of Holocaust songs by a children's choir, presenting of children's essays, Questions and Answers with Dr. Eliach, reading of poems written by children during the Holocaust, and children's discussion with Dr. Eliach on the theme of "What Can I Do for Peace Now".

Above all, Dr. Eliach's lecture including her experience during the Holocaust at the age of four had a great impact on all children who participated in the meeting. Many children responded to Dr. Eliach's strong will to transmit the facts of the Holocaust in spite of her deep sorrow, and left the impression that they wanted to do something to reply to her enthusiasm towards peace.

At the end of the Fukuyama Meeting, "Peace Appeal" was declared by 100 children on the stage and was followed with their great singing of "Believe", a popular song in Japan. These meetings were also held at three other places: Okayama, Kyoto, and Tokyo, all of which were well covered by television stations, the major newspapers and also by newspapers for junior high students and school children.

It was racial discrimination, prejudice and indifference which made the tragedy of the Holocaust happen, which deprived 6 million innocent Jewish people of their lives. These facts of 20th century history is not yet well understood by Japanese people. The Holocaust Education Center has welcomed 34,000 visitors, and we would like to continue our activities into the 21st century. I especially hope that children of Japan learn and get to know the facts of the Holocaust and become people who will act on their own to create peace.

During her stay in Japan, Dr. Eliach mentioned this phrase a several times: "If you wish, it is no longer a dream."

もしも願いを叶えれば、それはもう夢ではない。

It happens to be the phrase which have led my life. It certainly is the phrase which will be the guideline for me in my Holocaust education in Japan.



Makoto Otsuka, Director.



Children's Peace Appeal.

The Program of the "The Children's Meeting on the Holocaust '99" in Fukuyama

"The Children's Meeting on the Holocaust '99" was held at the "Hiroshima Prefectural Citizen's Culture Center in Fukuyama" in Fukuyama City, Hiroshima, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Friday, July 29. About 500 people, mainly students from elementary, junior and senior high schools, participated in the meeting.

The main program consisted of a morning session starting with the reading of children's poetry of the Holocaust, followed by an opening message by the Director General, Mr. M. Otsuka. A short play "At the Eishyshok Shtetl" was performed, which retraced the childhood experience of the Holocaust survivor and researcher, Dr. Yaffa Eliach, the main guest for the meeting. The script of the play was originally written by interviewing Dr. Eliach. Following the play, Dr. Eliach gave a lecture entitled "What happened in Eishyshok" and talked about her own experience at the age of four during the Holocaust. After the lecture, she answered questions from the audience.

The afternoon session included three children presenting their essays on the theme of "My Peace Message: From the Children Who Will Lead the 21st Century" They were the winners of the essay contest held by the Holocaust Education Center from April to September in

1998. The next event was the introduction of peace activities done by children in Japan (four groups reported their activities on stage, and four groups held exhibitions on their activities at the Culture Center Hall.) "Small Hands", a volunteer group of children at the Holocaust Education Center, presented roses called "Souvenir of Anne Frank", raised at the Center, to 23 organizations which participated in the meeting from all over Japan.

Following the children's chorus of "Donna Donna" and "Lonely Child" which are songs of the Holocaust, seven students from junior and senior high schools discussed the theme of "What I Can Do for Peace Now". There was an active exchange of ideas among students such as; "We must know the facts of the Holocaust and educate our next generation", "It is important to care for the others", "Each one of us should act with the vision of creating peace in the future". Dr. Eliach, her husband, Rabbi Eliach and Director General Mr. Otsuka joined the discussion by giving them comments.

Finally, Dr. Eliach gave a message titled "To the Japanese children".

"It was always the adults who were discussing for the children. This is my first time to attend a meeting which was planned and managed by the children. The group 'Small Hands' is not small at all. They are active hands which are filled with life that will create peace. You are the bridge to peace in the 21st century."

The meeting was concluded by children's declaration of "Peace Appeal" and singing the song "Believe" together with the audience.

The meeting in Fukuyama was planned and prepared by about 40 children members of Small Hands. They spent six months prior to the meeting studying about the history of the Holocaust and discussing the program and the organization. We believe that this success of the meeting opened a new page in the Holocaust Education Center's activity in Japan.



Play "At Eishyshok Shtetl".



Discussion on "What can I do for Peace Now".

Peace Appeal declared by the children

"Holocaust" comes from a Greek word which means to "burn everything". It happened in Europe and Russia from 1933 to 1945. Six million Jews were killed, and among them there were one and a half million children.

Professor Yaffa Eliach is a survivor of the Holocaust. She is among 29 survivors out of the 3,500 Jews who lived in her hometown, Eishyshok. Only four children, including Dr. Eliach, out of 900 children survived. There are no Jews in Eishyshok today. The Holocaust started with people's indifference, prejudice and discrimination. What occurs in your mind after knowing these facts?

From her experience, Dr. Eliach established a Holocaust Center in the United States. She started with travelling all around the world by herself, gathering photographs from survivors and their families, researching each picture and recording each name. She wanted to let people in the world know the truth of the Holocaust.

Mr. Makoto Otsuka, Director General of the Holocaust Education Center in Fukuyama, Hiroshima, met Mr. Otto Frank, father of Anne Frank, 29 years ago. He established the Center willing to "tell the truth of the Holocaust to children in Japan" to transmit the message he received from Mr. Frank, "Please do not just sympathize with Anne, but try to become a person who will do something to create peace". It was because the 20th century's tragedy of the Holocaust was a creation of the human beings, must have been restored by the hands of man.

Since its opening in July 1995, 32,500 have visited the Center and learned about the Holocaust. Then we, "Small Hands", were born. We publish the newsletter "Small Hands", make videos introducing the Center, and present Anne's Rose, a symbol of peace, to people all over Japan. Through these activities, we have always thought about "What can I do for peace now", which led to the opening of the "Children's Meeting on the Holocaust '99" this year. We have learned to care for the others and to try to understand with each other no matter what difference we have in race, ethnicity, or religion.

The 21st century is approaching. We are the children who will lead the new century. Let's think about "What I can do for peace now", "What can you do for peace now?"

Let's continue to study the facts of the Holocaust, so that it will never be repeated.

Today, July 29, 1999, is the day when we all start again. Small Hands, Create Peace !