



### **YWCA of Japan statement:**

#### **In Solidarity with #BlackLivesMatter, Calling for the Elimination of Racism**

The YWCA of Japan, as a part of the global YWCA movement, stands in solidarity with the YWCAs around the world including YWCA USA and the World YWCA after the murder of George Floyd by the Minneapolis police. Together, we call for a just investigation and that those accountable be brought to justice. We stand in solidarity with #Blacklivesmatter and call for the elimination of structural racism from our society.

Japanese society has perpetuated and strengthened its own racism. This society continues to ignore the human rights of people who have fallen through the gaps and to clearly oppress and violate the human rights of minorities, under the false perception that we are a “homogenous nation.”, with a value system with its core in the Emperor system which labels people as “noble” or “lowly”, “superior” or “inferior.”

Racism is apparent in Japan in ways including the following:

- The way foreign workers are the first to lose their jobs under the Corona pandemic; the Government policy of determining the eligibility of foreign students for COVID-19 financial support by their school grades, whereas there are no such criteria for Japanese students; how those who have become unregistered migrants for various reasons, including the suspension of language schools and workplaces resulting from the pandemic, have been left behind the relief measures;
- Arbitrary police questioning and violence against people who do not look “Japanese” or white;
- The inhumane treatment of those who have come to Japan as refugees;
- The situation of Okinawa, once an independent kingdom but annexed by Japan, used as a “seawall” for the mainland during the final months of the Asia-Pacific War, handed over to the U.S. after the war, housing 70% of the U.S. military bases in Japan even after being returned to Japan, and even now, about to be forced to house new military bases in Henoko and Takae destroying nature and residents’ lives while ignoring the clear will of the residents shown through a number of elections;
- The experience of the Ainu people whose land has been stolen, and have been denied the space to practice their traditional way of life, language and culture;
- The way the Government insisted “there are no indigenous people in Japan” until 2008

- after the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;
- The continuous discrimination against the Buraku people, clearly pointed out as “descent-based discrimination” by international human rights mechanisms including the Committee on Racial Discrimination and the Human Rights Council;
  - The invasion and exploitation of other Asian countries including the Korean Peninsula during the war, and the cruel sexual violence committed there against women; the discourse 75 years on, which instead of facing fault and responsibility, idealizes the war of invasion, denies/distorts the historic facts and insults the victims;
  - The situation of the ethnic Korean community who have lived in Japan for multiple generations after their homeland was split as a result of the invasion by Japan, yet are deprived of human rights including election and education of their ethnic identity and language; the prejudice and hate directed towards them;

In addition, there is a serious lack of social awareness and actions regarding the multiple discrimination faced by women and sexual minorities belonging to racial and ethnic minority groups.

Many of us “Japanese people”, who are able to live each day unconscious of such structural inequality, are in fact benefiting from the privilege within the social structure that functions by oppressing the human rights of minorities. Not facing this truth and not raising a voice against racism means accepting the status-quo, and even if we believe we are “well-intended”, taking part in that injustice. We have the responsibility to act.

We stand in solidarity with #Blacklivesmatter because this is not only something happening in another part of the world. This is apparent in the insensitive depiction of the #Blacklivesmatter protests by the public broadcaster NHK, in addition to ignoring the murder by police and promoting prejudice and negative views against the movement. It is wrong to characterize the issue as a foreign problem. Instead, racism is a deep-rooted problem which has infected our society for centuries.

The YWCA of Japan upholds the vision of a society where “people of different generation, cultures and backgrounds are respected and valued”. As declared in the 2009 “Apology for the Asia-Pacific War and the Resolution for Commitment to World Peace”, it has been our great repentance that we were not only unable to stop the Japanese aggression but also were obliged to collaborate in the war. Upon this regret, we have raised our voices for peace, and continued programs such as the “Japan-Korea Youth Conference”, “Nanjing Peace Pilgrimage” and

“Pilgrimage to Hiroshima”, valuing the communication and networks with YWCAs in the Asia Pacific region and creating spaces for learning and action. Local YWCAs throughout Japan are also dedicating efforts to promote multicultural coexistence in many different ways.

We are committed and hereby declare to continue combating racism and taking action for a world where all people are respected, together with our YWCA sisters and friends around the world.

22nd June, 2020

YWCA of Japan