



Joint Statement by Korea and Japan YWCA For Peace and “Safe Space” for Girls and Young Women

We, the Korea YWCA and Japan YWCA (hereinafter referred to as the Korea-Japan YWCA), held the 12th Korea-Japan YWCA Conference over four days in Kanagawa, Japan, under the theme: “What is a Safe Space that YWCA can Provide for Young Women and Girls – In terms of Human Rights, Peace, and *Ibasho*(place to be accepted)” Through this conference, we aimed to share practices from the World YWCA-initiated Safe Space movement with and for women, young women and girls.

We reaffirmed that despite the economic and social development of both countries, women continue to face discrimination, exclusion, hate, and inequality in their everyday lives.

As we marked the 80th anniversary of Korea’s liberation, we recognized that Korean residents in Japan (*Zainichi* Koreans) have long faced structural discrimination, including identity denial, employment discrimination, and exclusion from social security systems. We learned that *Zainichi* Christian communities and women have refused to remain silent and taken action to improve their lives. We were also deeply moved by their continued efforts, Joining hands with conscientious Japanese citizens, in leading the enactment of anti-discrimination ordinances to resist hate and promote a caring, inclusive, and multicultural society.

Reflecting on this historical context, we confronted the following questions:

- How are we responding to discrimination and hate?
- Whose suffering is the YWCA paying attention to?

We empathized with the struggles of today’s youth and shared with one another our diverse responses. We reaffirmed our unwavering commitment to YWCA’s mission: “Transforming society through the empowerment of women, young women and girls,” even in the face of challenging circumstances.

The Japan YWCA raised concerns that younger generations are influenced by historical distortion and revisionist narratives that downplay Japan’s wartime responsibility. These concerns highlighted the need for safe spaces where people can talk together about the social norms necessary for living in harmony. We also shared the ongoing reality in Okinawa, where 70% of U.S. military bases in Japan are concentrated, and where gender-based violence resulting from the presence of the bases and structural discrimination that disregards local residents’ voices continue to persist.

Local YWCAs in Japan are actively engaging with young women and girls facing various difficulties, providing physical and psychological safe spaces to live in and supporting them to live in their own way. They offer spaces for girls who cannot live with their families and require social care, youth who struggle with attending school or employment due to physical or mental health issues, and those who are isolated due to loneliness or anxiety stemming from difficult interpersonal experiences. These spaces serve as places of empowerment where basic living conditions and meals are ensured, dignity is restored, and both mind and body are healed.

Japan YWCA also engages in peace-building activities, passing on the memory and lived experiences of war together with young people, and providing safe spaces where multiple generations can express their views.

'Safe Space' is not merely a physical space free from violence; it is about healing past wounds through justice, reclaiming women's autonomy, and fully enjoying the right to speak without fear. We believe that this is a space where the dignity of each individual is protected, where differences are celebrated as richness, and where new relationships are built.

Korea YWCA emphasized the reality of discrimination, hatred, and violence that young women experience today in both online and offline spaces as a result of structural gender inequality, as well as the historical legacy of state-sponsored violence during Japanese colonial rule, the division of Korea, and dictatorship. They shared stories of women in their teens, twenties, and thirties who have created social change through solidarity and mutual support. This has taken place even when backlash against feminism has intensified—dismantling women's policies and mounting attacks on feminism, thereby weakening the very foundations for women to protect themselves and raise their voices.

Korea YWCA also shared practical cases of developing governance structures that enable young women to participate actively in the organization's decision-making, and of local YWCAs providing spaces, programs, and networks that help them explore their identities, develop agency, and exercise leadership in their communities.

The Korea-Japan YWCA states the following joint positions:

- We recognize that a "Safe Space" is not just a physical location, but a social practice where respect, care, reflection, and solidarity are alive. We will continue to work together so that young women and girls can fully enjoy their rights and live as their authentic selves.
- We oppose all forms of hate and discrimination against minority communities, including *Zainichi* Koreans, in today's multicultural society.
- We call on governments, educational institutions, and the media to reflect on their roles in spreading discrimination and hate, and to establish institutional foundations for peaceful coexistence.
- We commit to strengthening solidarity between Korean and Japanese civil societies to build a peaceful East Asia free from hate.

The Korea-Japan YWCA will take the following joint actions:

Raise public awareness that economic and psychological insecurity and structural violence are not personal problems for a few vulnerable individuals, but urgent social issues that can affect all young women and girls and must be addressed.

Build networks and promote collaborative programs where young women and girls can come together, share experiences, and discuss social issues that affect them.

Create opportunities and community-based spaces where young women and girls can take direct initiative in designing and leading the social, political, and cultural activities they need as empowered agents of change.

Identify and connect human and material resources at national and local levels to support the creation and sustainable operation of safe spaces for young women and girls.

Document and share case studies and know-how in implementing "Safe Spaces," building a collective archive of experiences across East Asia to be actively used and expanded.

Starting from this conference, the Korea-Japan YWCA will continue to share experiences, learn together, and take action with young women and girls to build a world without discrimination and a peaceful community for all.

July 23, 2025

Participants of the 12th Korea-Japan YWCA Conference