

# Japan: Human Rights in Corporate Management and in Society

Corporate Federation for Dowa and Human Rights Issue, Osaka

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**I**N RECENT DECADES, the important role that companies play in promoting human rights has been attracting attention not only in Japan but also internationally. In particular, in March 2011, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted the “Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights,” requiring member-states to formulate national action plans. In response, in October 2020, Japan adopted its National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights (2020-2025).<sup>1</sup>

This global trend is expected to grow even stronger in the future. But prior to the global focus on linking business to human rights, it is not well known that companies in Japan had started in late 1970s to develop and implement initiatives to address human rights issues. This was the initiative of corporate liaison associations that were formed in various parts of the country to address the Dowa problem (Buraku discrimination issue) in response to a 1975 discrimination case involving companies.

This article introduces the human rights education program of the Corporate Federation for Dowa and Human Rights Issue, Osaka (Osaka Doukiren), which was formed in late 1970s in Japan and has been actively implementing activities on the business and human rights issue. It is hoped that this article would be useful in revitalizing efforts by companies to address human rights issues not only in Japan but also around the world.

## Osaka Doukiren

In February 1978, fifty-two companies established a voluntary organization called the Corporate Federation for Dowa Issue, Osaka with the aim of solving the Dowa problem (Buraku discrimination issue). This organization was composed of companies with head or branch offices in Osaka Prefecture. More companies became active members later on. This organization was later known as Corporate Federation for Dowa Issue and Human Rights Issue, Osaka (Osaka Doukiren).

Osaka Doukiren adopted these goals:

Aiming for “corporate management that respects human rights” and “realization of a society where human rights are promoted” from a corporate standpoint.



Meeting on establishment of Osaka Doukiren on 22 February 1978.

### Coalition of Companies in Osaka

Directories of the Buraku communities collectively referred to as *Buraku Chimei Soukan* (部落地名総鑑) were uncovered in 1975. These directories listed the locations and names of places of discriminated Buraku people across the country. They were purchased by more than two hundred twenty groups, mainly companies, nationwide. Companies purchased these to help them avoid hiring residents of the Dowa district (discriminated Buraku residents). This incident exposed the companies' discriminatory nature.

After these discriminatory directories were exposed and protested by the Buraku liberation movement, companies initiated concrete measures to address Dowa issues (Buraku issues) and human rights issues. This discrimi-

natory book incident was taken up in the Diet at that time, and became a major social issue.

This became known as the Buraku Lists Incident.

The establishment of Osaka Doukiren started with the purchase of this “Buraku lists” by companies. The failure of the companies that purchased the list to notice the discriminatory nature of purchasing it, to try to correct this discriminatory act, and to express regret for their discriminatory act, led to the establishment of Osaka Doukiren.

### **Corporate Federation for Dowa and Human Rights Issue, Osaka**

In 1965, the Japanese government’s Dowa policy council reported that resolving the Dowa issues was “a state responsibility and at the same time a national issue.” The Law on Special Measures for Dowa Projects, was subsequently enacted in 1968 to address the issue. The special measures law lapsed in March 2002, and after that, the special measures under this law were integrated into the general measures of the government.

In April 2003, Osaka Doukiren changed its name to the Corporate Federation for Dowa and Human Rights Issue, Osaka, with the words “human rights” being added.

Today, in order to eliminate various forms of discrimination, including the Dowa issues, Osaka Doukiren further strengthens its promotion of the idea of companies that respect human rights. It is undertaking various activities in cooperation with relevant government agencies and civil society organizations with the aim of realizing a “society where human rights are promoted” from a corporate standpoint.

### **Activities of Osaka Doukiren**

Osaka Doukiren holds various activities including those on human rights awareness-raising.

It sees the importance of member-companies themselves promoting management system and business activities based on the spirit of respect for human rights. Human rights awareness-raising is an extremely important initiative in helping companies establish systems and standards for making judgments, etc. from the perspective of human rights and in conducting business in a manner that respects human rights.

## Start of Human Rights Awareness-raising activities in 1978

In the same year of its establishment, in 1978, Osaka Doukiren published a booklet entitled *Kigyo to Dowa Mondai* (Business and the Dowa Issue) and distributed 13,000 copies to member-companies to deepen the correct understanding of the Dowa issue, based on the view that an urgent solution to the Dowa issue was a national challenge and a social responsibility that companies were expected to tackle.

In April 1978, a training session for new employees of member-companies was held, and in November 1978, a training program for mid-career employees, who play a central role in raising human rights awareness within member companies, was started.

Osaka Doukiren continues to hold human rights awareness-raising activities and workshops, mainly for member-companies, with the aim of providing opportunities for company officials and staff to participate in human rights training and in the sharing of human rights information.

It started holding in-house training, study groups led by member-companies, and lectures for managers of member-companies.

It fosters human rights awareness by learning about various human rights issues, including the Dowa issue, directly from the local community.

Groups of member-companies meet to learn from each other's experience on human rights-related activities such as those on employment and awareness-raising, and make use of the experiences in their companies.

In addition, by actively participating in training sessions organized by related organizations, Osaka Doukiren established a system of sharing the latest information on various human rights issues that helped officials of member-companies to have a high level of awareness of respecting human rights.

Osaka Doukiren believes that it must continue to communicate the importance of respecting human rights to member-companies at every opportunity. In this way, awareness-raising activities through Osaka Doukiren in cooperation with the top management of member-companies and other responsible persons and personnel will lead to human rights awareness-raising being held continuously within each member-company.

From February 2020, in view of the serious situation brought by the COVID-19 pandemic and to prevent the spread of virus infection, much of the activities Osaka Doukiren shifted to online mode.

## Activities from 2022 and Onward

From 2022, the following activities were held:

### I. Introductory Course on Awareness-raising on Dowry and human rights issues

This course was meant mainly for young and new company employees. It was held online on 6-22 April 2022, with one session being held in L Osaka (Osaka Prefectural Labor Center). The course had the following program:

Lecture I, Theme: “Business and Human Rights – Considering Human Rights from the Perspective of the SDGs “

Lecturer: Masaaki Shibamoto (Director, Support Center, Osaka Business and Human Rights Council)

Lecture II, Theme: “Current Situation of Buraku Discrimination - Elimination of Discrimination Based on Human Rights Awareness Surveys”

Lecturer: Ryushi Uchida (Professor, Faculty of Sociology, Kansai University)

The course was attended by seven hundred ninety-four participants. They gave the following feedback:

- I used to be careful not to discriminate against anyone. But now, since I am a member of society, I feel that I must be aware of actions to eliminate discrimination and encourage the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

- I was in awe of the fact that the consciousness of “defilement” that was born hundreds of years ago has remained to this day. I have learned about Dowry issue many times before, but from now on, as a member of society, I would like to take responsibility for respecting human rights and make efforts to eliminate discrimination. If I ever encounter a situation of discrimination, I would like to confront it with correct knowledge.

- The two lectures were very informative with easy-to-understand materials and stories. I realized once again that it is important to incorporate human rights issues into our daily lives.

- As an employee of a global company that also deals with overseas customers, I would like to think more about what I can do to build a better society, without being misled by misinformation.

- I strongly felt that I would like to become fully aware of [human rights] and intentionally prevent discrimination based on a solid understanding of their true nature.

- I am now aware that I knew about the SDGs, Buraku discrimination, and the Dowa issue after listening to the entire lecture. Therefore, I am glad that I am able to learn about these issues at this time, when I will become a new member of society.

- I have been thinking that “if everyone forgets about Buraku discrimination, it will disappear, and that will be fine,” but today’s lecture made me understand that “knowledge is necessary to make the right decision.” It was a very informative lecture.

- I am aware that this is a very sensitive and difficult issue. It seems that there is either a goal or no goal in learning human rights. If there is a goal, I sometimes wonder if a new problem will sprout. I am aware that if there is no goal, and even if there is one, the next problem may sprout. This course reminds me to become aware of human rights issues in my daily life.

## II. Dowa and human rights issues awareness-raising course (Managers)



Dowa and human rights issues awareness-raising course for managers.

This course was meant primarily for company managers. In addition to attending lectures at the venue (L Osaka) on 22 July 2022, online lectures were held with both live and recorded streaming on 8-26 August 2022.

The course had the following program:

Lecture I, Theme: “Making Majorities’ Privilege Visible ~ Seeing discrimination as our own concern ~

Lecturer: Makiko Deguchi (Professor, Faculty of Foreign Studies, Sophia University)

Lecture II, Theme: “What I was asked by the reality of Buraku discrimination ~Thinking about “resolution” and “liberation”~”

Lecturer: Norio Takahashi (NPO Human Rights Center Nagano).

A total of one thousand thirty-three participants attended the course. Some participants expressed their feedback on the session:

- The presentation was easy to understand and explained the image and awareness of “privilege” by using the analogy of an automatic door and introducing activities that can be done in the classroom.
- I felt that it is important for the majority to take action.
- The lecture was not only understandable intellectually (head), but also touched the hearts of the participants because of his passionate talk about the reality of discrimination and his desire to resolve it and liberate people from it.
- It was a good reminder. I especially noticed the importance of community support.
- The real voices from the field resonated with me. I felt that we have to think about discrimination as our own. I felt that I have to think about discrimination as my own.
- It was a great opportunity for me to learn new things and to complement what I have learned so far.
- This was my first time to participate [in the course]. The contents were easy to understand and meaningful. I would like to use this as an opportunity to gain access to a variety of information

### III. “Top Management Meeting” of member-companies



A “Top Management Meeting” of member-companies.

The heads of human rights department of member-companies gather to share information on how to manage their companies in a way that respects human rights.

On 22 February 2023, the company officials met in the Osaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry building and held a human rights education session. They came together to study contemporary human rights issues, including the Dowa issue, and the activities of the Osaka Doukiren. The officials reported on the achievements of the member-companies on human rights activities, explained the outline of the activity policy from the new fiscal year onward, and provided information on human rights initiatives of member-companies that they would implement.<sup>2</sup>

A lecture on the theme “Change: Respecting Diversity and Making a Company Where All Can Shine in Their Own Ways.” was delivered by Takao Ando (Chairperson, Sanyo Chemical Industrial Company).

The session was attended by two hundred eighty-six participants.

Some participants expressed the following feedback on the session:

- I realized that it is important to utilize diverse human resources from the perspective of “fairness.”
- I sympathized with the idea of difference between “Equality” and “Equity.”
- I shared the idea of reforming the way to work with the company’s very diverse and unique approaches.
- I found the human resource system and culture reforms and the measures to promote the advancement of women very helpful.
- I would like to think about the implementation of human rights due diligence and its assessment at my workplace.
- It was very useful for me to reorganize my knowledge and awareness of human rights issues.
- I was able to deepen my understanding of the human rights situation in Japan, where comprehensive legislation is lagging behind.

### *Group activities*

Osaka Doukiren holds meetings attended by representatives of member-companies. These company representatives are divided into different groups to discuss issues/topics independently.

The groups, with eleven to thirteen representatives of member-companies in each group, do the following activities:

- Introduce specific initiatives by group



- Meet once a month
- Do on-site training (one-day trip and overnight stay once a year)
- Have mutual learning and awareness-raising, etc.

## Call for Human Rights Slogan Entries



Osaka Doukiren holds an annual human rights slogan competition. It calls on its member-companies (including group companies<sup>3</sup>) and three economic organizations in Osaka (Osaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Kansai Economic Federation, KANSAI Association of Corporate Executives), etc., to submit human rights slogans to the competition to raise awareness of human rights among employees of member-companies and their families.

The best entries are selected in February of each year and given awards at the annual meeting of top executives of member-companies held in the same

month.

Posters of the best human rights slogan are printed and used as educational materials by member-companies and related organizations.

This competition has been going on since 1979, the year after the establishment of Osaka Doukiren, as part of the Human Rights Week celebration in December each year. This is one of the most important activities of Osaka Doukiren.

In the 2022 human rights slogan competition there were four hundred eleven entries from member-companies (each member-company submitted three entries).

There is no information on how many entries were collected by each company from which it selected three entries for the competition. The number of entries ranges from a few dozen to more than 10,000, depending on the company.

Fifteen entries were chosen from which the best entries were categorized. The following were the categories of the best entries:

- 45th anniversary special work: one work (only in 2023)
- Excellent work: two entries
- Honorable Mention Award: eleven entries (one slogan from each group)

The best entries were the following slogans:

a. Best work

It's fun because there are differences, and it's wonderful because we accept each other's differences.

(違いがあるからおもしろい 認め合うからすばらしい みんなでつなぐ多様性)

b. 45th Anniversary Special Prize

If you try to eliminate your preconceptions, you will see a wider view, and if you take action, the future will change.

(先入観なくしてみたら 広がる景色 行動すれば 変わるよ未来)

c. Excellent works

Let's connect heart to heart

Respect your own sense of values, respect others' sense of values

(つなげよう 心と心 温ライン)

大事にしよう 自分の価値観 尊重しよう 相手の価値観)

## Human Rights Information and Osaka Doukiren Website

The website of Osaka Doukiren provides information on its activities on human rights to deepen understanding of respect for human rights not only among member-companies but also among a wide range of people.

The “Topics” page contains information about the various activities of Osaka Doukiren.

The “Series” and “Information Board” sections contain different types of information such as Q&A on human rights, historical figures related to human rights, and other information.



QR Code of the Osaka Doukiren website, [www.osaka-doukiren.jp](http://www.osaka-doukiren.jp).

The website had been accessed in 2022 as follows:

Number of accesses per year: 72,910 visits

Number of accesses of main pages:

- About Osaka Doukiren: approximately, 23,000 visits
- “Q&A” series: about 20,000 visits
- “My history Tour” series: about 8,000 visits.

### Public Relations Magazine



Hotline 21 magazine

Osaka Doukiren publishes a public relations magazine named *Hotline 21* twice a year to provide information on its activities and various human rights-related topics.

It has 2,700 copies per issue that are distributed to member-companies, government agencies, civil society organizations, National Corporate Federation for Dowa and Human Rights Issue, etc.

The basic contents of *Hotline 21* consist of featured articles, on-site training reports, NEWS BOX (projects of Osaka Doukiren and related organizations), Q&A (commentary on the latest human rights keywords), essays, etc.

Special Feature: “On the 100th Anniversary of the Founding of the Osaka Suiheisha (Levelers Association)”

- The historical significance of the Osaka Suiheisha and the thoughts and significance of the future liberation movement
- The 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Founding of the Osaka Suiheisha.

Special Feature: “Scenes of blind women in the past” - Remembering blind traveling women entertainers from the sound of their playing the shamisen”

Field Trip Report: Visit to Senzaki and Shimonoseki, Yamaguchi Prefecture, to learn about human rights

NEWS BOX: Responsible person meeting, training session for newly-appointed responsible persons and training session for newly-appointed responsible persons

Lecture on awareness of Dowa and human rights issues (management level)

Buraku Liberation and Human Rights West Japan Summer Course  
Multi-Ethnic Human Rights Research Meeting

Buraku Liberation and Human Rights Summer Course (Koyasan)

Human Rights Seminar

Human Rights and Dowa Issue Corporate Lectures

- What is “SDGs Achievement Ranking”?
- What is “microaggression”?
- What is psychological safety?
- What is “wellbeing”?



Osaka Doukiren publications

## Other Publications

Osaka Doukiren has been coming out with various other publications since 1983. The main publications are the following:

- *In Search of the Origin of Discrimination: A Trip to India to Study the Caste System* (June 1983)
- *Five Years of Transformation of the Heart* (September 1983)

- *Spring in the Land of Winter: A Report on Training on Ainu Issues in Hokkaido* (December 1984)
- *Enclave of Lamentations: Discriminatory Precepts in the Tōshin Region of Nagano Prefecture* (March 1987)
- *What the Old Documents Knew: Gorobei Water Supply and the People* (February 1991)
- *Awareness-raising and Employment: A Record of Practice: Results of the exchange of practical experience over the past 10 years* (October 1991)
- *Record of Friends Who Walked Together: A Collection of Experiences of Participating in the National March and the Osaka Prefecture Aminome [Networking] Action* (November 1992)
- *Testimony from Inside the Company: Facing the Buraku Issue* (August 1998)
- *You Can Do It, Too: A Corporate Human Rights Training Handbook* (March 2005)
- *30 Years of the Buraku Lists Incident: Lessons Learned and Challenges Ahead* (July 2005)
- *Activities and History of Osaka Doukiren* (July 2006).

## Symbol of Osaka Doukiren

Osaka Doukiren adopted this symbol:



The two “circles” represent the head of a person, and the “heart,” which appears as a body part, is represented by a single thick line in the motif of a river, which played an important role in the development of culture and commerce in Osaka.

The symbol was created in 1992 to commemorate the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Osaka Doukiren, and is still in use to this day.

## **National Corporate Federation for Dowa and Human Rights Issue**

Osaka Doukiren and similar corporate federations were organized in different prefectures of Japan since the late 1970s to address Dowa issues. These federations in turn established in 1985 the National Corporate Federation for Dowa and Human Rights Issue.

Since its establishment, the National Corporate Federation for Dowa and Human Rights Issue has been holding a national meeting every December during the Human Rights Week that brings together members from all over Japan to deepen exchanges and cooperation. Currently, there are thirteen federations with 1,493 member-companies.

In addition, it participates in the Central Executive Committee for Buraku Liberation and Adoption of Human Rights Policies, which calls for the establishment of a legal system for human rights at the national level, and in the International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination (IMADR), which has consultative status with the United Nations and participates in efforts to eliminate discrimination from the entire world.

In addition, it cooperates with government agencies and civil society organizations from the standpoint of companies in each region to exchange and share useful information as a national federation of companies.

## **Osaka Doukiren's Basic Direction for the Future**

From the standpoint of the business sector, Osaka Doukiren aims to contribute to the “establishment of corporate management that respects human rights” and the “realization of a society where human rights are promoted” by conducting various activities and programs centered on “employment” and “awareness raising” on various human rights issues, including the resolution of the Dowa issue, in cooperation with relevant government agencies and civil society organizations. It aims to be an advanced human rights organization.

In October 2020, the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights of Japan was released and disseminated. Since companies are required to exercise human rights due diligence in their operations, Osaka Doukiren will continue to strive to disseminate useful information and implement its programs in support of this requirement.

## **Endnotes**

1 National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights (2020-2025), available at [www.mofa.go.jp/files/100173319.pdf](http://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100173319.pdf). For more information on this document, see Business and Human Rights, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, [www.mofa.go.jp/ fp/hr\\_ha/page23e\\_000551.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/hr_ha/page23e_000551.html).

2 For more information on this matter, visit [www.osaka-doukiren.jp/activity/enterprise](http://www.osaka-doukiren.jp/activity/enterprise).

3 Group company refers to any business entity consisting of different companies or a company and its subsidiaries.