

Opening Statement to AAAOW on 27th August 1988

"Willy Asia and Apartheid Now?"

We are very glad to be able to meet the people who are fighting against apartheid and other forms of oppression and discrimination all over the world and in Japan. Welcome to Japan during the hottest time of the year, which is unbearable even for us. '

There are two reasons why we had the idea of holding a grass roots or citizens' group workshop on apartheid. Firstly, in spite of a worldwide trend towards strengthening economic sanctions against the apartheid regime of South Africa, East Asian economies such as Taiwan, Korea, Hong Kong and Japan have increased their economic ties with South Africa and have become powerful partners of apartheid. And, unfortunately, the voice against apartheid in these economies is rather weak.

That does not mean that in these regions there is no struggle against discrimination or against oppression. There are such movements -- it is only that there is usually no link with action against apartheid. "

It is worth mentioning that Japan has become South Africa's biggest trading partner and in 1987 enjoyed trade amounting both ways to US\$4.2 billion. At the same time Taiwan increased its trade by 67 per cent between 1986 and 1987 to reach US\$910 million. The citizens of both Japan and Taiwan have been given the title of "honourary whites".

The second reason for holding this workshop was that there has been some disappointment with the international conferences which have taken place so many times in European and North American cities. In such conferences citizens' groups or ordinary people from the so-called Third World countries have hardly appeared. For such people, their only way of showing their concern about apartheid is through the process of fighting their own issues, which are for them of equal importance to apartheid. Such issues, however, have not generally been discussed in the international conferences concerned with apartheid.

Those are the reasons we decided to open this workshop. Although we are just a very small citizens' group, it has been possible to realise this conference with the great assistance of the United Nations Special Committee against Apartheid and many other organisations and individuals inside and outside Japan. You may notice that we do not call it a conference but a workshop. The reason is that we hope to gain mutual understanding and to establish cooperation, which are more important than deciding on platitudinous resolutions. Unless we understand each other well, we cannot take action together.