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RACISM DEMANDS MORE THAN APOLOGIES

By Albert L. Nellum

In the wake of the derogatory and inflammatory comments by Justice Minister Seiroku Kajiyama comparing American Blacks to prostitutes in Japan, one of the most frequently asked and most troubling questions in Japan today is, "What do these Black Americans want?... "Why are they so upset about one man's stupid mistake?" As a Black American who has devoted considerable time and resources to bridging the gap between the Black community and the Japanese people, and having spent the past two weeks in Japan dealing with the subject, I want to offer some thoughts on these basic, yet critical questions.

On the question of one man's mistake and his apology, the Japanese must remember, as most African Americans do, that this is not the first such insult from a high official in the Japanese

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Only five years ago, Congressman Mervyn Dymally, the then Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus led a delegation of African-American business and political leaders to Tokyo at the time of the apology of then Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone. We explained to Mr. Nakasone that our delegation did not come to discuss the apology, but rather to suggest constructive programs aimed at educating Japanese leaders and the public to the history, culture and Contributions of African-Americans and viable strategies to involve African-Americans in business relations with Japanese corporations.

While in Tokyo we also met with members of the Diet, representatives of the Foreign Ministry, MITI, JETRO, Kridanren and a number of large Japanese corporations with operations in the United States. We outlined specific programs--educational, economic and cultural--designed to bring about better understanding and relations between our peoples.

Shortly after this Visit, We met again with Mr. Nakasone during his visit to Washington. He assured us our recommendations were being studied. Despite these meetings and many follow-up discussions with government and corporate officials, no appreciable progress has been made nor is a commitment to progress clearly visible.

Now, after another high level insult, we are expected to accept this apology as well. Black people have a saying, "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me." We cannot be satisfied with another apology, when we believe it fails to

recognize the roots of a very serious problem.

Also, not to be overlooked is the fact that Minister Kajiyama's position carries with it responsibilities for human rights and equality under the law. It is impossible for us to accept a person in this position who harbors the Views expressed by Mr. Khjiyame; we would like to think it is unacceptable to Japanese leaders and citizens as well.

The outcry in response to this issue has not been limited to African-Americans, although we were the first to express outrage. We have since been joined by a large segment of America's white population, including the Congress: Black people in Europe, Canada, and many African countries; African-Americans living in Japan; and the entire delegation of African ambassadors assigned to Japan. This latest insult has taken on an international significance, the full effect of which cannot yet be measured. During the past week, there has been increasing support in Japan for going beyond mere apologies to formulate a realistic and forthright response to the issue of racial discrimination in Japan. Major newspapers have editorialized on the subject, politicians from all the opposition parties and even members of Kajiyama's own Liberal Democratic Party have joined the call for his dismissal and sought broader action.

For us the cry for Kajiyama's resignation is symbolic. What Blacks are demanding is respect; Respect as people, respect as consumers of Japanese products, respect as producers and procurers of many of the minerals necessary to fuel the Japanese economy, respect as a large segment of the armed forces recently dispatched to protect Japan's oil supply from the Persian Gulf, respect for our numbers, respect for our power--and respect for our potential. Beyond respect, we seek honesty, or as one Japanese paper put it in an editorial, it is time Japan confronted "the demon of racism." Just this past week, in the wake of the Kajiyama insult, I have been told by many people here in Japan, including highly placed government officials, that Japan is not racist and that racism is not a part of the day-to-day life here. To that I replied that there are hardly any blacks here against whom racist feelings could be shown. Of course, they could not deny the discrimination against Koreans and Burakamin peoples in Japan. But, perhaps the Japanese do not recognize this treatment as racism since all concerned are Asians. Racism or not it is discrimination based on prejudice. It is wrong, it is immoral, and it is not fitting conduct from the people and leaders of one of the world's leading economic powers.

But while Japanese leaders are arguing that there is no racism here, I must tell you what I have observed here in Japan during the past week: ,

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o a racist ad featuring a grotesquely photog:aphed Black musician is playing regularly on national :elelevision. The ad is selling a major electronic brand which is also distributed in the United States.

o Two insulting political cartoons in the Suniay Japan Times. One depicted Blacks as naked savages and another, in a national Japanese magazine called Takrajima shows a thick-lipped, bulging-eyed. character labeled "Mandela."

o African-American visitors touring in Osaka and Minoo City were shocked to find such items as cups and pillows with grotesqua and embarrassing stereotypes of Blacks on them. In another instance, they were called monkeys when they got onto an elevator.

0 And, as.I haVe been told this week by many African-Americans whc live in Japan, Blacks frequently experience racial insults and incidents, while traveling and working in Japan.

AfricansAmericans want the Japanese to recognize that a very real racial problem exists here and something must b6 done about it. By recognizing that the comments, incidents, cartoons, ads and products decorated with racial stereotypes are not just the result of carelessness or ignorance, but grow out of the image your society projects and perpetuates of Black people, Japan will take a most important step toward a solution. When Black people are depicted as human beings--raising families, managing companies, saving lives or doing anything else that is useful to spciety, that will be progress.

What steps can be taken to achieve such progress? I urge the creation of a special Diet or Ministry level commissicn to combat racism in .Japan with responsibility' to .plan. and cmordinate a national effort in this area. Such a commission would have wide-ranging authority, a budget, and competent, committed staff sufficient to coordinate activities in the public and priVate sectors. Its goal would be to eliminate negative racial attitudes, stereotypes and images in Japan by the year 2000.

As part of this long-range program, relevant activ ties of the Ministries of Education, Justice, International Trade and Industry, Culture, and others should be thoroughly reviewed to identify issues and opportunities and to promote changed attitudes. To be more specific, I urge:

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with minority contractors.

desire to work in cooperation with

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been a frequent visitor to Japan

African American cooperation.

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government agencies, in private industry, in your

national education system, in the media and among the

o A major public education program 'to affect the attitudes

of the citizenry. For example, Japan shou;d institute

a national Black History month, highlighting' the

historic contributions and achievements of blacks in

schools, forums, muSeums and.the mediae-at once educating

issue priority. BLacks living

in Japan could be enlisted to give speeches, visit

schools and organize programs. They have told me they

decide to reach out to them.

a More cultural exchanges involving African Americans and

But visitors must teach, not

A similar and comparable effort must be made in the private

sector in Japan and abroad. Corporations must be moved to give

more than lip service to "good corporate citizenship." They must

Blacke as employees, and as

contractors. They must not avoid Black communities when they

locate new facilities in the United States. They must recognize

Where to begin? State that a

lars to be spent through the

When the AfricaneAmerican business community first responded

to the comments of Mr. Nakaeone five years ago, we made clear our

the Japanese people to bridge

the difference between us. We remain willing to do so; but we Want

evidence of Japan's willingness to help us build this bridge. Th2

Kajiyama affair can either be another wound in the relationship

between AfricanwAmerican and Japanese people, or the foundation for

substantive change. We sincerely hope it will be the latter.

A. L. Nellum and Associates,

America's oldest African American consulting and training

organization, and President of the Black Business Council. He has

and a crusader for Japanese-