

## 'Japanese rainbow' gathers tens of thousands to defend Article 9

"It is simply the major peace event this year" a peace researcher told me, while discussing the Global Article 9 Conference to Abolish War which took place in Tokyo - with parallel meetings in several other Japanese cities - from May 4 to 6.

Inspired by the Hague Appeal for Peace Conference, where the global civil society gathered a decade ago around the theme of a culture of peace, the Article 9 conference has managed to revive the same dynamic. The overwhelming attendance mirrored the richness of the programme: besides heartening addresses by prominent activists and marvellous artistic performances, over thirty symposiums, panels and workshops tackled a large variety of peace related issues, including non-violence, disarmament, environment, nuclear threat, peace education, women's initiatives, military bases, depleted uranium weapons, countries without armies, role of media, economic globalization, etc.

Young ex-soldiers and aid workers were also there to give striking testimonies on the dire situation brought to Iraq by the US armed intervention. Another moving moment was provided by the students of the Bornfree Art School [[www.bornfreeart.org](http://www.bornfreeart.org)] from India, who explained the sad reality of child labour and how education and arts could help free the world's 246 million toiling children.

I had the chance to take part in one of the panels, where I presented the IPB 'Disarmament for Development' project [[link to my presentation text](#)], together with contributors from Africa and Asia who explained the impact of armed conflicts and military presence on the most vulnerable populations.

All the rooms were crowded with people standing by the walls and doors left opened for those in the corridor to follow. In a swarming hall, dozens of booths presenting the initiatives of multiple civil society groups would also remind us of the creativity and dedication of the Japanese grassroots movements.

Although the vast majority of the twenty thousand people who came to the conference over the two days were Japanese, one could meet many foreigners, especially students; the age average of the public seemed rather high but mothers with children were present as well, and if we take into account the myriad of youth volunteers, one can say with confidence that the whole spectrum of society was represented.

In contrast with this lively and colourful meeting, the black painted cars of the nationalist groups - often to be seen in Japan - passing by with their loudspeakers shouting "Let's stop the conference!" offered a pathetic opposition.

This conference, which proved to be a very intense and stimulating event, was the highlight of a campaign launched three years ago by Peace Boat and the Japan Lawyers International Solidarity Association (JALISA), with the support of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC). Seeking to prevent the amendment of Japanese Constitution's pacifist clause, the Global Article 9 Campaign to Abolish War [[www.article-9.org](http://www.article-9.org)] also aims at making it into an international instrument for the promotion of peace through human security.

Article 9 has been supported by the Japanese population for nearly sixty years, although the government has largely bypassed it and rearmed the country under US pressure.

Today, the only way to protect it and to claim a full implementation is to show that its two principles, namely the war renunciation and the ban on military, can be internationalized. As we know, some countries have already succeeded in abolishing their army, but can we imagine what a difference it would make if the world's second economic power could live up to the ideals enshrined in its Constitution, and if a growing number of parliaments could pass similar laws?

The abolition of wars will undoubtedly require more than legal texts. All the efforts and actions already undertaken towards a culture of peace must be pursued and strengthened; their variety is essential to cope with the complexity of the problems facing our world, but coordination and mutual support is also vital to keep the momentum.

On its 63<sup>rd</sup> Global voyage for peace and sustainability next fall, the peace boat will call at ports in 21 different countries. Its passengers will meet with governments and the civil society to spread out the message that peace without armies is possible. Let us support them and get inspired by their initiative. Let us use the "rainbow 9" as a symbol and a tool in each of our struggles for building a world of peace.

Article by Frederic Durand, IPB International Representative during the Article 9 Conference in Japan.