



On the occasion of the 30th Year Anniversary of the Japanese UN volunteer District Electoral Supervisor, The LATE NAKATA ATSUHITO and Cambodian interpreter Lek Sophiep were killed in an ambush in Kampong Thom, Cambodia in 1993, a conference was organized by the Kyoto Peacebuilding Center, Kyoto University of the Arts and supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and the UN Volunteers Programme as well as the Japan Parliamentary Committee of the Diet of Japan for World Federalism at the Kyoto University of the Arts on 5 and 6 April 2023. As part of the conference, Working Group 4 discussed the theme of Japanese UN Volunteers: Past, Present, and Future.

**Summary of Group 4:  
Japanese UN Volunteers: Past, Present, and Future**

**Moderator:**

Mr. SHINODA Hideaki, Director, Hiroshima Peacebuilders Center and Professor, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

**Rapporteur:**

Mr. IKEDA Yoshinori, United Nations Volunteers (UNV) Tokyo Liaison Office

**Discussants:**

Mr. SAKAGUCHI Naoto, Former UN Volunteer Electoral Supervisor, Former Member of the House of Representatives of the Diet of Japan

Mr. OYAMADA Eiji, Professor, Doshisha University

Ms. IKEDA Akiko, Former UN volunteer and Senior Administrative Officer, Regional Office for Northern Africa, FAO Cairo

Ms. ABE Akiko, Former UN Volunteer and UN Staff, GPAJ/Peace and Development Specialist

Ms. NAITO Ayaka, UNV: Former UN Volunteer, Partnership Development Officer (JPO), ILO Decent Work Team, India Office

Mr. ITO Yoshikazu, Former UN Volunteer (1971 Yemen), Member of the Meguro Environment Committee (Reborn Meguro) , Advisor of NGO・IPLIPL no kai

Mr. SUZUKI Shunsuke, Former UN Volunteer in Cambodia, Director of AMDA-MINDS

Ms. YAMADA Mayumi, Assistant Professor, College of International Relations, Ritsumeikan University

### **Summary:**

Under the theme 'Japanese UN Volunteers: Past, Present, and Future', our group 4 discussed the history of the deployment of UN Volunteers (especially Japanese), the impact of Mr. Nakata's death, and what individual participants had realized through their UNV experience, among other topics. Participants ranged from those in the first batch of UN Volunteers to those who were at or around the same time as Mr. Nakata, those who had completed their assignments in the past few years.

The key questions that we tried to address, among others, included:

1. What were the expectations, roles and status of UNVs in the past and present?
2. If we observe any changes in UN Volunteers, what are the reasons for such changes?
3. Do we see any impact of Mr. Nakata's passing on such changes?
4. Is there a need for further practical improvements? What are the barriers to making such improvements?
5. What are the long-term expectations for UN Volunteers in the future in order for the UN to respond to the challenges in today's world?

With regards to the history of the deployment, Director Sato from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), and Professor Shinoda of Hiroshima Peacebuilders Centre, an implementing organization for the pre-departure training, explained one example of how the death of Mr Nakata had affected the deployment of Japanese volunteers and led to the decision to start the Programme for Human Resource Development for Peacebuilding. They shared that the person in charge of the UNV at the time was working under Professor Hasegawa, and recruited Mr Nakata in Cambodia, and that the Programme was realized with such passion and the enthusiasm of the people at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the time.

Professor Oyamada, who coordinated the interview and deployment of Mr Nakata at the time, also explained the impact of the passing of Mr. Atsuhito Nakata and the activities of his father, Takehito Nakata, on Japanese society. Specifically, the following improvements have been made for instance: 1) a change in the awareness of young people towards international volunteering, as even an individual can become an international volunteer; 2) progress in understanding and institutionalization of volunteering in Japanese society, including in the private sector; and 3) improvements in the insurance scheme for travel

to conflict-affected areas. He then stressed the importance of passing on what these Nakata father and son activities achieved to the next generation.

This was followed by a discussion in which each participant introduced themselves and shared about their involvement with the UNV or their involvement as a UN volunteer and what they have gained from it, focusing on the five key questions mentioned above.

Key observations include:

1. The importance of field work was emphasized, such as the fact that volunteers can work closely with local communities and foster trust because they are volunteers.
2. Many highlighted that, as UN Volunteers, the allowance that they receive is not necessarily high, but they would gain experience in a UN organization, get an inside view and can develop networks.
3. While in recent years, the number of talented volunteers has increased with more expertise and language skills, there is a tendency among some volunteers to see UNV only as an entry point to the UN, and it was discussed whether the volunteer spirit and initiative that motivated Ms Nakata may be weakening.
4. On the other hand, there was a discussion on how to strike a balance between the satisfaction in the activity and security, and that is because, on the one hand, the spirit of volunteerism in pursuing rewarding experience should be promoted, and, on the other hand, difficulties in dangerous areas can make the activity more rewarding. Here again, the importance of trust in the local community, which was mentioned earlier, as the greatest security measure, and the importance of pre-deployment briefings, etc., was underlined.
5. It was also suggested that in an environment promoting the SDGs, not only the UN, governments and civil society, but also private companies need to integrate social action into their visions and daily operations, which may have good potential for promoting volunteerism as a society.
6. There was also a discussion on the future of UN Volunteers, as there are sometimes no further job opportunities after completing an assignment. It would be ideal if UN Volunteers themselves would be able to make their own decisions from a wider range of options. Such examples could for instance include for their host entity to explore the possibility of creating a position linked with new project formation and fundraising at the start of their assignment, and if they were given continuous follow-up and advice from advisors.

The theme also dealt directly with the issues around UN Volunteers, and as such, the overall atmosphere of the discussion was friendly and relaxed.