

# Report on 4<sup>th</sup> Asia/Pacific Building Unions Seminar, Tokyo, March 2006

John Sutton, National Secretary CFMEU Construction & General Division - 16 March 2006

## Overview

The Seminar was highly successful in terms of strong attendance, quality papers presented, good interaction of seminar participants, agreed concluding statement and enjoyable social activities.

## Attendance

Trade Unionists from 13 countries participated in the seminar. They were: China (2), India (3), Bangladesh (1), Pakistan (1), Mauritius (1), Philippines (1), Indonesia (1), Vietnam (3), Australia (5), New Zealand (1), Canada (1), Denmark (1) and Japan (approx. 80-100).

## Papers Presented

Every country presented a paper of some kind. Several countries presented multiple papers. The standout papers from my point of view were: India on migrant labour, Denmark on Asbestos, Japan on the struggle of self-employed dump truck drivers, Australian academic on migrant labour issues, Indonesia on Tsunami, Philippines on migrant labour, good Japanese papers on most topic headings. My opening presentation was probably reasonably effective.

## Participation

Most topics engendered good questions and discussion. Chairing of sessions was shared around and this aided participation. Most delegates actively participated with Comrades Binh (Vietnam), Signal (Canada), Hallet (Australia), Rosewarne (Australia) and Tupas (Philippines) especially lively in their contributions from the floor. Many Japanese delegates also actively participated from the floor.

## Concluding Statement

An agreed concluding statement was adopted (see Attachment 1). This statement both summarises some of the key policy views emerging from the seminar and provides a direction forward. As you can see from the statement the seminar has agreed a 5<sup>th</sup> Asia/Pacific Seminar should be held in Manila, Philippines in February 2007.

The Seminar also adopted a statement around the struggle to retain a peaceful Japanese Constitution (Attachment 2).

## Social Activities

Our Japanese hosts arranged a series of effective and enjoyable gatherings including attending various restaurants, experiencing Japanese cultural displays, enjoying a boat trip on Tokyo Bay and visiting some Japanese temples. The last organised activity was a tour of a construction site in Tokyo – the building of an underground tunnel. The hotel we were accommodated in was very modern and of a high standard.

## Costs of Seminar

Our Japanese hosts spent something in the order of \$80,000US on this Seminar. A magnificent contribution to building relationships between construction unions in the Asia/Pacific and a fantastic contribution towards building the UITBB. The Seminar facilities including interpreting were appropriate for the occasion.

## Special Thanks

Approximately 20 Japanese unions participated at the Seminar with many of these unions participating months in advance on the Japanese Organising Committee for the Seminar.

Special thanks must go to Kenkouro and Comrade Fujioshi in particular. His months of work beforehand and very hard work during the week of the visit of the delegates paid off with a highly successful event.

Comrade Fujioshi was ably assisted by about 6 key people who undertook many of the necessary tasks. Our gratitude goes out to all these comrades.

## Attachment 1

### RESOLUTION OF PARTICIPANTS AT THE 4<sup>TH</sup> ASIA/PACIFIC MEETING OF CONSTRUCTION AND WOOD UNIONS, MARCH 2006, TOKYO

This meeting of international representatives of construction, wood and related unions from the Asia/Pacific region meeting in Tokyo, Japan on 10-12 March 2006 resolves as follows:

1. We note the final resolution of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Asia/Pacific seminar of construction unions held in Hanoi in March 2005 and express our satisfaction that the decisions adopted in Hanoi were implemented in large measure.
2. We place on record our gratitude to the Japanese Organizing Committee for this 4<sup>th</sup> Asia/Pacific seminar, and acknowledge the excellent preparation, facilities and hospitality that has been afforded to us.
3. We resolve to continue our momentum that first began at our Sydney meeting in 2002 and move forward to organize a 5<sup>th</sup> Asia/Pacific Seminar of construction and related unions to be held in Manila, Philippines in February 2007.
4. That we produce a booklet in English containing all of the contributions delivered at our Tokyo meeting and distribute this publication broadly to construction and related unions in the Asia/Pacific region.
5. That we note the excellent level of participation of unions in our Tokyo seminar and urge the 13 unions participating to strengthen bi-lateral ties of solidarity between each other.
6. We call upon the UITBB Secretariat to publish a special edition of the UITBB Bulletin containing the issues and themes emerging from our Tokyo meeting.
7. On specific policy issues canvassed in our Tokyo meeting we say the following:
  - a) **Globalization** - We understand the accelerating pace of capitalist globalization across our region and resolve to work in every possible way to strengthen the regulation of working conditions for construction workers. We understand that the collective organization of construction workers through trade unions that are committed to action and struggle is the best way forward for workers of the region.
  - b) **Asbestos** - Having debated the asbestos question at length we note that the scientific and medical evidence on the danger of this building material is beyond doubt. We as a group of unions believe that this substance should be banned across our region and the whole world. We also note that asbestos is still being widely produced and used in our industry across the region and call on governments, employers and unions to work together to switch to substitute products as a matter of urgency. We believe that plans must be put into place immediately to save jobs and save lives by producing alternative products. We call upon the UITBB, its affiliates and supporters to participate in the proposal for a further protest against the Canadian Government attitude to asbestos planned for April 28, 2006.
  - c) **Precarious Labor** - We note with the spread of globalization that the working conditions of ever growing numbers of construction workers in our region are becoming more irregular and precarious as each day goes by. We resolve to share information on the latest trends and tactics used by the employers to evade responsibilities to construction workers. We also call on the ILO to adopt a robust instrument that might afford some protection to the huge numbers of workers affected.
  - d) **Migrant Labor** - We note that the central principle of globalization being the free and unimpeded movement of capital and labor across borders presents enormous challenges for trade unions, particularly for construction unions in the Asia/Pacific. We resolve to study the latest trends and patterns involved in the use of guest labor in our industry; we resolve to communicate with each other on developments in our own national setting; we resolve to seek to organize the growing numbers of workers involved and seek to regulate the standards applying to these workers by fighting to implement the prevailing standards of the host country; and lastly we determine that this issue shall feature as a priority policy issue at our Manila Seminar.
  - e) **Asian Natural Disasters** - We call upon all participants in our Seminar and friends and supporters across the region to provide material assistance to our sisters and brothers so tragically affected by the Asian Tsunami, the Pakistan earthquake and the Philippine landslides. We urge all involved in the reconstruction efforts to insist that building materials containing asbestos are not used. We acknowledge and thank those unions at our Seminar who have already lent material assistance.

We so decide.

**Statement**

**4<sup>TH</sup> Asia-Pacific Construction Workers' Seminar**

**March 12, 2006**

Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution stipulates the non-possession of armed forces and prohibits resort to military aggression.

Today, against the backdrop of the world strategy of neo-liberalism and the power of the multinational corporations, Article 9 is being placed under a growing pressure mounted by the U.S. and Japanese government and business circles.

Peace-loving people of Japan by a clear majority are opposed to the revision of Article 9. The international community has also expressed its concern. Many Japanese people and trade unions are strengthening their solidarity to stop this perilous development.

At the 4<sup>th</sup> Asia-Pacific Construction Workers Seminar, the movement of Japanese trade unions against the reorganization of the U.S. military has been reported on and both Japanese and overseas participants have stated that Article 9 should be preserved.

We, construction workers who are builders are committed to peace and stand in opposition to war.

We, the participants in the 4<sup>th</sup> Asia-Pacific Construction Workers Seminar demand that Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution be maintained and express our solidarity with the struggle of the Japanese people and trade unions.

March 12, 2006