

## **Religious NGO Network on Humanitarian Support (RNN)**

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Secretary General: Rev Munemichi Kurozumi (Vice Chief Patriarch, Kurozumikyo Shinto)

Chairperson: Ven Koushin Nagamune (Chief Priest, Honjoin Temple, Tendai-shu [Buddhist denomination])

Vice Chairperson: Mr Hiroshi Kawamoto (Church Management staff, Risho Kosei-kai Okayama Church [Lay Buddhist Organization])

Vice Chairperson: Fr. Izumi Nonaka (Father, Kurashiki Catholic Church)

### **What is RNN?**

Religious NGO Network on Humanitarian Support (RNN) is a united body of religious persons established in November 1996 in Okayama Prefecture, Japan. Currently the membership includes religious persons of twelve different religious denominations and organizations. They have made the following humanitarian support initiatives based upon interreligious dialogue and cooperation, going beyond the boundaries of denominational and organizational differences.

### **Establishment of RNN**

In February 1996 a big earthquake took place in Yunnan Province, China. Religious people of different religious organizations, denominations, churches and temples in Okayama Prefecture were asked by Association of Medical Doctors of Asia (AMDA), a large medical NGO headquartered in Okayama and a holder of the General Consultative Status of the UNECOSOC, to collect relief goods and they worked together at Okayama Airport for the shipment. In November the same year the 3<sup>rd</sup> Okayama NGO Summit was held under the theme of “religion” organized by an umbrella organization of NGOs within Okayama area including AMDA called Okayama Topia for International Contribution (OTIC [1994-2004]). In the main event entitled “Humanitarian Support Religious NGO Conference” (Nov. 24, 1996), the establishment of RNN with the membership of those who joined in the relief work for the Yunnan Earthquake and some foreign participants to the Conference was formally adopted. Since then the members in Okayama have held a monthly meeting (the 179<sup>th</sup> as of June 2012), having selected a chairperson, two vice chairpersons and a secretary general.

### **Characteristic of RNN’s Initiatives**

OTIC, the parent organization of RNN, was a civil organization based upon the philosophy that aims at promoting international contribution while vitalizing local communities based upon the spiritual climate of Okayama where humanism with regard to health care, education and religion, environment, social welfare, etc. were respected. In this sense RNN has a characteristic of being connected to and working together with non-religious organizations (NGO/NPOs) from the beginning, while conducting its own

humanitarian initiatives through RNN's foreign members and those connected.

### **Characteristic of the membership**

RNN neither has stipulated regulations nor membership fee. It has a consistent policy or principle that any RNN's activity should not burden each member's belonged religious group or organization, mutually respecting each other's positions, situations and its own activities. Participation to RNN's initiative is each member's own voluntary decision, and yet once participated, each of them should be responsible for what they say or do. And the initiative is to be carried out upon all the participants' agreement.

#### **【RNN members' belonged religions, denominations and religious groups】**

1. Catholic, 2. Islam, 3. Konkokyo (Shinto derived independent group), 4. Kurozumikyo (Shinto group), 5. Nichiren-shu (Buddhist denomination), 6. Protestant, 7. Rinzai-shu (Buddhist denomination), 8. Risho Kosai-kai (lay Buddhist group), 9. Shingon-shu (Buddhist denomination), 10. Sokagakkai (lay Buddhist group), 11. Tendai-shu (Buddhist denomination), and 12. Tenrikyo (Shinto derived independent group)

### **Outline of activities**

Interested members also made RNN Study Tours in which visits were made to the members abroad, inspecting local sites and holding exchanges, RNN Volunteer Lecture Course open to the public that introduced the actual situations of the places where the support efforts had been made, holding RNN Forum that is an open symposium aiming at promoting correct understanding on religions, joining in the interfaith memorial services in the disaster-stricken regions with local religious people, praying for the deceased, recovery of those suffered and damaged, and eventually for world peace. Since 2005 several member groups have held "RNN Healing Concert" for the memory of those who lost their lives by the war and disasters and for offering sincere prayers for world peace (eight times by June, 2012)

### **•Initiatives made for the East Japan Great Earthquake and Tsunami (March 11, 2011)**

#### **Street fund-raising in Okayama City (March 13-April 12, 2011)**

Soon after the outbreak of the disaster volunteered members started the fund-raising on the streets of Okayama City everyday for one month to be donated to AMDA. During the period altogether 511 persons joined the activity and ¥2,656,960 was collected. During and after the period RNN member groups also did their fund-raising and together with theirs, the sum total of ¥4,531,206 (about \$56,640) has been donated to AMDA. (The Riverside Church donation of \$1,258.06 is included).

Besides this RNN's fund-raising activity to AMDA, RNN members naturally have engaged in their denominations' or groups' fund-raising activities donated to other major aid organizations such as the Japanese Red Cross, etc., and the amount of which is quite extensive.

### **Simultaneous prayers for the deceased and victims in the stricken region and**

## **Okayama**

For ten days from March 19<sup>th</sup> one member (Shingon-shu monk) went to the stricken region as a volunteer staff upon request of AMDA. Besides the relieve activities he offered morning prayers at a local temple (used as a place of refuge) and RNN members in Okayama offered their prayers at the same time for the deceased and victims. He also recited sutras in prayer at temporary morgues upon request by the temple's priest, which was greatly appreciated and made him aware of the importance with strong demands in such a particular situation.

## **RNN Interfaith Memorial Service (April 29, 2011)**

On April 29, 2011, 50<sup>th</sup> day after the outbreak of the East Japan Great Earthquake, RNN held interfaith memorial service at Sunrise Ceremony Site of the Kurozumikyo Headquarters, the venue considered suitable, as it is situated on a hilltop facing the eastern horizon, i.e., the direction of the stricken region. RNN members of Catholic, Konkokyo, Kurozumikyo, Shingon-shu and Tendai-shu offered their prayers one after another. Before this, Shingon-shu priest who was in the stricken region made a brief report on his experience and at 14:26, the time of the disaster outbreak, around a hundred people participated offered their silent prayers.

## **Helping to pack into sets of stationery to be sent to senior high schools in the stricken region (April 10, 2011)**

In receipt of AMDA's request RNN's Shingon-shu member who was in the stricken region called around 80 local primary school pupils, junior and senior high school students to come to his temple and pack stationery sent from six senior high schools in Hiroshima to be sent to students of the stricken region via AMDA. They made 1500 sets of stationery for individual use, which were shipped to the senior high schools in the region.

## **Held the RNN Bond-making Meeting (August 2, 2011)**

### **A part of AMDA East Japan Great Earthquake Friendship Programme through Sports Exchanges (August 2-5, 2011)**

This programme was planned to strengthen bonds between the supporters in Okayama and disaster stricken region through sports exchanges. Football teams of three junior high schools in the region lead by the teachers and AMDA staff were invited to Okayama to have games with the local junior high schools and exchanges for making bonds with one another for encouragement.

On the first day (August 2) upon their arrival RNN held Bond-making Meeting. Memorial service was made By Kurozumikyo Shinto priests at the prayer hall of Kurozumikyo Headquarters. Before the service five RNN member groups (Catholic, Konkokyo, Kurozumikyo, Tendai-shu and Shingon-shu) offered their prayers facing to the east onto the prepared presents; bond-signed stickers and key rings attached with braided cords. The work of attaching braided cords to key rings was made by local junior high school students. After that, Barbecue party was held to welcome them and they all had a joyful time of exchanges for making bonds.

**RNN Secretary General visited a social welfare organization, NGOs and NPOs in the stricken**

**region as a part of WCRP Japan's support project (August 10-13, 2011)**

Rev Kurozumi (Secretary General of RNN, also a Councilor of WCRP Japan) and other WCRP staff visited Iwate and Miyagi Prefectures to meet with local representatives of a social welfare organization, NGOs and NPOs supported by WCRP Japan in order to discuss what they can do on concrete terms in cooperation. They also visited AMDA's local health support centre.

**RNN Secretary General took Okayama's university students to the stricken region (August 24-26, 2011)**

Rev Kurozumi, being a selected leader of the local university students, took them by bus to the region, visited various support organizations and did some volunteer work such as getting rid of rubble, etc. Exchanges were made with junior high schools whose football teams visited Okayama for the Bond-making Meeting.

**RNN Interfaith Memorial Service (March 11, 2012)**

On March 11, 2012, one year after the disaster RNN held the second memorial service at Sunrise Ceremonial Site of the Kurozumikyo Headquarters. RNN members of Konkokyo, Kurozumikyo, Risho Kosei-kai, Shingon-shu and Terndai-shu offered their prayers one after another. Before that AMDA's President Dr Shigeru Suganami greeted and thanked the participants of around 80 people and at 14:26, the time of the disaster outbreak silent prayer by all was offered. Dr Suganami told the participants that religious persons working together with AMDA's medical staff in the stricken region is an integral part of their initiative, making the support work more complete.

**Offering Prayers at AMDA Bond-making Concert in Okayama (March 19, 2012)**

In receipt of AMDA's request four RNN members led a silent prayer with all the participants at the beginning of the concert. A brass band of Otsuchi Senior High School in the disaster stricken region was invited to Okayama and performed together with local Shujitsu Junior and Senior High School brass band. This was followed by the exchange between them, creating bonds among them.

**RNN Secretary General attended a WCRP Japan sponsored Joint Interfaith Memorial Service at a temple of the Stricken Region (March 21, 2012)**

Rev Kurozumi attended a WCRP sponsored Joint Interfaith Memorial Service for the Victims of the East Japan Great Earthquake and Tsunami held at a local Jodo-shu Buddhist temple in Otsuchi Town. He also visited Otsuchi Senior High School whose brass band visited Okayama a few days ago for further strengthening the bond with them.

**RNN Secretary General participated in a WCRP Japan organized Round-table Conference in Sendai**

WCRP Japan organized a round-table conference in Sendai City, one of the cities stricken by the disaster, with a local interfaith council whose member groups have conducted various support initiatives as kind of working units immediately after the March 11, 2011. They discussed what they can do together, taking the advantage of being an interfaith body. They have conducted, e.g., spiritual support or consultation for

the people in trouble through their established radio station. They are trying to set up a system of qualifying clinical religious advisors on their set standard for the traumatized victims without delving into their religious conviction. They have advised and supported the disaster victims when they had a trouble with cult members who quietly approach to them in hospitals, places of refuge, universities, etc. This type of support initiatives are made possible or socially acceptable because of the interfaith or interreligious nature of the religious council and WCRP.

**RNN held Volunteer Lecture Course: Religious Persons Needed in a Disaster-stricken Region – Learning from the East Japan Great Earthquake and Preparing for a Possibly Occurring Great Disaster (May 28, 2012)**

RNN has decided to hold an open Lecture Course at Kurozumikyo Headquarters out of the members' concern that another large earthquake and tsunami epicentred along the Tokai, Tonankai and Nankai Troughs could occur at anytime in the future and thus RNN should be duly prepared in receiving, first of all, professional advices from AMDA. The day's two-hour programme, therefore, was started with AMDA President, Dr Suganami's lecture followed by a symposium participated by Dr Suganami, Ven Koushin Nagamune (Chairperson), Mr Hiroshi Kawamoto (Vice Chairperson), Mr Takeshi Sugimoto, Ven Ryumon Miyamoto and chaired by Rev Munemichi Kurozumi (Secretary General). Dr Suganami made many important points in conducting emergency medical support. He firmly believes that religious persons are essential as they can cover spiritual side of support to the victims which AMDA's medical staff cannot engage in. Working together certainly makes the support work more complete. In further enhancing the understanding and knowledge on the theme, the second lecture course may be held, taking into account the response and opinions of the participants collected via a questionnaire.