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Short Report of Students as Partners

First of all, I appreciate JICUF and Ms. Takada for giving me the great opportunity and financial support to join Students as Partners. The conference gave me the confidence to keep my refugee support action and various ideas and hints for Culture and Diversity in Japan (CDJ) activity. This short report will show my main takeaways from the conference, CDJ's brief future plan, and some of my opinions.

Takeaways

The conference gave me three things; the uniqueness of Japan in terms of refugee students' support, what is important for CDJ's activity, and how I should set my mind as a leader of refugee student supporters.

First, I felt that Japanese students must develop a system of support for refugee students since I realized the huge gap in the situation of refugee students between Japan and Western countries. The majority of delegates at the conference came from universities or organizations in Western countries, and they had a lot of experience accepting refugee students. Then, through the dialogue with them, I became aware that Japan is a developing country in the context of support for refugee students and that Japan needs to establish a framework for support for refugee students as soon as possible. Also, I realized that Japan and Western Europe have different cultures and structures, such as language barriers and difficulties in finding employment, and that students in Japan need to be creative in their support activities rather than just adopting models

like International Students Overcoming War (ISOW). Therefore, the conference told me that I should take a leadership role in order to activate support activities for refugee students by students as soon as possible, not only at ICU but also in Japan as a whole.

Second, the delegates of Students as Partners gave me a lot of advice about refugee support activities. I especially asked how to make a sustainable framework both in each supporting group and in Japan. Participants told me many hints; establish a trusting relationship with international students through a tiny step; do not be afraid to take risks when starting a new activity; offer support to professors and universities. For example, one Waterloo University student said they held bowling, picnics, movies, and dinner as social events. Moreover, she told me that asking for help and finding needs is difficult unless they can build trust and friendship. Also, I learned that understanding the purposes for refugee supporting action is necessary to make members actively join activities. Therefore, I have reaffirmed the importance of more active CDJ activities and collaboration with other student groups and universities.

Third, participants gave me the confidence to develop CDJ as one of the role models for refugee student supporters in Japan. Of course, I was enthusiastic about refugee support volunteers before participating in the conference, but it became more solidified and concreted through workshops and discussions with delegates. For example, I was very nervous and felt that my plan was rudimentary and not worth presenting, as I heard university students in Canada and the U.S. talking about high-level action plans. However, the students and professors from Guilford University who were at the same table told me that my action plan, which I will show later in this short report, was crucial and that I should put it into practice. Moreover, when I talked about sustainability, some students agreed on its importance and difficulty. Then, sustainability became one of the main discussion themes at my workshop table, and I was happy

to contribute to the conference despite it being tiny. Also, I was very impressed by students who are already taking leadership in humanitarian action by students. Hence, Students as Partners strongly motivated me to try new activities of CDJ after returning to Japan.

Action Plan

This part concerns the action plan I made on the second day of the conference. CDJ and Japanese universities have a lot of problems in terms of refugee students' support; not many chances to interact between international students and Japanese students; few students, faculties, and universities engage in supporting action; language barrier; lack of role models; the difficulty of finding refugee students' needs; limitations of what students can support (e.g., employment); and so on. To address these difficulties, providing many opportunities for students to interact with each other and encouraging them to build friendships are necessary. Friendship and trust relationships would be important to find difficulties international students have and get rid of their anxiety and loneliness. Therefore, CDJ needs to do regular activities and build connections between ICU and other universities or organizations, like Sophia University and EmPATHy led by Suzan, as short-term milestones. Then, medium-term milestones are to expand the network around Japan and hold events for intercollegiate exchange and job-hunting support after graduation. Finally, keeping these actions and creating or joining a global network with universities and faculties are long-term milestones. Now, CDJ has already held regular lunch meetings every Friday and tried to cooperate with R-Navi, a student organization providing refugee employment support. Also, it is possible to cooperate with EmPATHy because I could build friendships with Suzan, one of the representatives of EmPATHy. In addition, I shared what I learned from the conference with some CDJ members, so I would like to keep telling members the reasons for CDJ's activities to encourage them to join more events than last year. In summary,

I would like to actively engage in CDJ activities in cooperation with other organizations and share our purposes and experiences with future CDJ members and other university students.

My Opinions

As I have already mentioned, Students as Partners was an excellent opportunity to think objectively and concretely about our activities for students with refugee backgrounds, thanks to the presence of many role models and the support of professors and professionals in humanitarian action. Hence, it is ideal for university students accepting refugees to participate in such conferences, but it is unrealistic due to financial problems. Also, since I had some difficulties communicating in English, and the difference in the situation of refugee students prevented me from understanding some contents of plenaries, such conferences held by Western countries might be inefficient for Japanese students now. Therefore, having a forum in Japan to learn about refugee students' support and what each university does for students with refugee experience is a first step to building nationwide relationships and encouraging participants to engage in the action more passionately. It would be wonderful if ICU and EmPATHy had the initiative for this conference. For that reason, I propose to organize a conference for student-led support for refugee students in Japan.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Students as Partners taught the importance of improving CDJ to take leadership for universities in Japan in terms of support for students with refugee backgrounds. Also, it gave me a chance to make a concrete action plan with fantastic students who already take the initiative for humanitarian action on campus and faculty members and professionals who guided students and gave them confidence. I will keep working to achieve my plan with

colleagues and hope to have or create opportunities to learn from each other about refugee support in Japan. Again, I sincerely appreciate the support of JICUF.