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Japan

Tokyo Rainbow Pride back again: more than two hundred thousand joined in solidarity with LGBTQI people

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One of the largest LGBTQI pride festivals in Asia was back again in full following a three-year hiatus after the COVID-19 crisis. (Last year saw a limited return with the restricted number of participants and international travel restrictions. Some events were held online because of limitation of in-person contacts.)

Tokyo Rainbow Pride (TRP) including "Pride Festival" and "Pride Parade" was held on April 22 and 23 in Yoyogi Park of Shibuya Ward, one of the largest green spaces in Tokyo. A total of 240,000 people joined the events with the theme "Press on till Japan changes".

Since 2012, TRP has been held in April. It is not held in June like the Pride-related events of other countries because of Japan-specific circumstances such as weather conditions and Japanese workers' consecutive holidays.

Shibuya Ward is one of the most popular areas of Tokyo and pioneered with same-sex marriages and civil partnerships conferring comparable legal status in 2015. The move in Shibuya Ward was totally different from then prevailing Japanese attitudes to sexual minorities. In the same year, Setagaya Ward, which is located next to Shibuya Ward, also started issuing certificates to same-sex couples that recognize their partnerships as equivalent to marriage.

After 2015, other local governments followed suit and more than half of local governments in Japan have established a partnership system. In 2003, Kamikawa Aya was elected to the municipal assembly in Setagaya Ward. She was Japan's first openly transgender public official. In March 2021, the Sapporo District Court said the Japanese government's failure to recognize same-sex marriage was unconstitutional. Sexual minorities whose existence had been ignored have definitely gained official recognition.

In the last 10 years, the number of participants in Tokyo Rainbow Pride has increased by 53 times. On the other hand, sexual minorities in Japan still face discrimination in their workplaces and in their lives despite raising awareness of LGBTQI people in the Japanese society, causing many to hide their sexual identities.

Most of the problems remain unsolved in the society. Partnership system is not legally binding and does not guarantee the same rights as those of married man and woman couples. Japan still does not recognize same-sex marriage as a country. And the country has no law to prohibit discrimination against LGBTQI people. The Japanese government still does not recognize the existence of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and nonbinary people and even denies their dignity as human beings. Campaigns for the rights for LGBTQI people have been stonewalled by incumbent Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and conservatives in the Liberal Democratic Party. Japan is the only G7 member that has not recognized same-sex marriage/enacted the anti-discrimination laws for LGBTQI people.

At this year's Tokyo Rainbow Pride, ambassadors from the US, the UK, and the Netherlands participated in the events asserting the rights of sexual minorities. Japanese activists are also urging the government to enact anti-discrimination law before G7 Hiroshima Summit.

Along with Tokyo Rainbow Pride, Tokyo Liberation March was held on April 22 in the same Shibuya Ward. The event was planned separately from Tokyo Rainbow Pride in order to make a wide range of anti-discrimination claims such as intersectionality (various forms of discrimination and social exclusion) and compound discrimination.

The event was organized mainly by LGBTQI and sex workers. Shibuya Ward has a long history of excluding homeless people when turning a park near Shibuya Station into a commercial facility. About 200 activists and various minorities who resist discrimination and exclusion walked the streets of Shibuya claiming against LGBTQI discrimination, exclusion of homeless people, gender inequality, poverty and inequality, and discrimination against foreign residents in Japan.

Solidarity, not exclusion!

A society where LGBTQI people and oppressed can live with dignity is a society where all people can live with dignity. All oppressed people must unite to institute the equality laws that prohibits all forms of discrimination.

26 April 2023

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