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APLA and its Direction

17 May, 2008

Dear Partners and Friends,

We are pleased to announce that Alternative People’s Linkage in Asia (APLA) is established on 17 May, 2008. APLA will move forward to link up each other, work together and share the experience with those people trying to establish self-reliant local communities based on sustainable agriculture and fishery.

■ Linkage with people fighting globalization, the cause of poverty and disparity

Magnitude of negative aspects of globalization has been prevailing in this century. We find everywhere that our life and livelihood are increasingly under threat. We witness growing disparity between urban and rural areas, uncertainty in the livelihood among the disadvantaged, and insecurity of food safety and such.

Yet there are many people who, challenging superpowers and multinationals, have been seeking for alternatives, and their experiences are as valuable as to be shared among us.

Crossing borders separating peoples and countries, APLA will learn lessons from the past as well as ongoing experiences, share wisdom at the grass roots level and seek our future alternatives.

■ Over twenty years of experience of community building support and “people to people trade” will be passed on.

Over twenty year experience of solidarity and support for self-reliant community building by Japan Committee for Negros Campaign (JCNC) will be succeeded by APLA. JCNC was first engaged in emergency relief activities to aid sugarcane workers and their families in Negros

Island, the “sugar pot” of the Philippines, who were suffering from hunger caused by steep decline of international sugar market in the 80’s. Then it developed its activities into the support of struggles of sugarcane workers and small-scaled family farmers who sought for self reliance of their communities based on sustainable agriculture. The idea of “People to People Trade” was also brought up as an important tool for solidarity and socio-economic independence. Thus Alter Trade Japan (ATJ) was founded in cooperation with civil organizations in Japan engaged in consumers’ movements. As ATJ grows, “People to People Trade” of ATJ has developed its solidarity with people of Indonesia, East Timor, Palestine, and so on.

Furthermore, JCNC facilitated marginalized farmers in the Island of Negros, organized exchange programs of farmers in the Philippine and in Asia. Among others, gatherings of urban and rural women in Asia have always been prominent.

■ Community building and solidarity at the grass roots level will be indispensable.

From these experiences and lessons, we have learned that community building based on sustainable agriculture and fishery, and face to face solidarity and mutual trust will be the key for people to fight against globalization which is the cause of inequity, poverty and conflicts among ordinary people. Recent events of poisonous Chinese dumplings exported to Japan tell that our livelihood is easily endangered and anti-foreign feeling will quickly arise under globalization. We believe that it is important to have a common perception of the reality and difficulties of farmers and workers in Asia, and to build up mutual trust with them.

APLA will work toward this direction and pursue solidarity and co-existence at the grass roots level.

■ Direction and Actions of APLA.

Based on the experiences and perspectives stated above, APLA will mainly focus on the following activities for the start.

1. To facilitate community development projects centering on the idea of “Local Production for Local Consumption” in Negros Island and Northern Luzon both in the Philippines, East Timor, and Surabaya in Indonesia.
2. To organize exchange programs for farmers, fisher folks and those engaged in self-reliant community development projects in different regions and countries. Priority will be given to foster the linkage among women in rural and urban areas.
3. To act as a catalyzer for partner producers and consumers to strengthen their tie in “People to People Trade”.
4. To strengthen advocacy and campaign against the globalization led by superpowers and multinationals in cooperation with various social movements world wide.
5. To engage in research work and make visual materials for education and publicity.
6. To widely send out domestic and overseas information through Halina (the bulletin), booklets, e-mail magazine and etc.
7. To open internet shopping site and promote sales of ATJ goods and other fair-trade goods.

8. To organize study tours and exchange programs.
9. To hold gatherings, forums and symposiums on various topics.
10. To engage in emergency relief.

Working with Asian people who are trying to establish self-reliant local communities will be a challenge for us Japanese; it means that we have to rethink our current way of life which eats up every kind of foods produced across the world. APLA will go beyond the conventional overseas aid practice and relationship between Japan and Asian people. Instead, APLA is pursuing the alternative ideas and the linkage of actions at the grass roots level in Asia.

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APLA and its overseas partners

■ Partners raised 4 common issues to be tackled

Members of APLA and its 4 overseas partners discussed what were the main issues to be tackled. The following 4 issues were raised by overseas partner members:

1. establishment of self-reliant local community
2. raising of more cash revenue for food, medicine and education
3. pursuit of sustainable agriculture and fishery
4. meeting and maintaining human and social needs

■ Four Overseas Partners to APLA

1. NBA (Negros, Philippines)

NBA is a small-scale farmers' network composed of three farmers organizations: Nagasi Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (NARB), Balangon Growers Association (BGA) and Negros Organic Farmers Association and Advocates (ANOFA). NARB was formed with 75 family farmers who had fought a long, hard agrarian land reform struggle against their landlords. The member farmers, small-scale family farmers, engage in organic sugar cane farming and diversify their production like vegetables, rice and corn. BGA was formed with 17 banana producing communities in Negros Island from which Alter Trade Japan imported their very first organic bananas. BGA now organize about 700 families. ANOFA was formed with some 50 vegetable grower families. NBA has launched its "local production for local consumption" projects in Negros, including joint domestic marketing in cooperation with consumers living in the urban areas.

2. CORDEV (Northern Luzon, Philippines)

Banana growing communities in the Northern Luzon joined ATJ's people's trade in 1996. CORDEV, Cooperative for rural Development, had mainly engaged in organizing banana growers till 2008 when it was reorganized into a cooperative trade association with the main aim "local production for local consumption". Its staffs are mainly composed of the indigenous people in Ifugao and Bontoc. CORDEV tries to establish its domestic trade network including consumer's areas such as Manila and Baguio, and just started the joint production of compost with 8 producers cooperatives in the Northern Luzon.

3. KSI/HAKADA (East Timor)

KSI is an NGO in East Timor established in 2000. Its predecessor was the East Timor Students Solidarity Council. KSI works for establishing self-reliant communities through programs for reconciliation and social change. The wide ranging activities include research and advocacy on the unsolved land reform issues, support for victims suffered from various violence, organizing producer's cooperatives in rural areas, and people's trade networking through KIOS movement mainly for women. HAKADA is a NGO in Ermera district, organized by former activists in student movement. HAKADA is an offspring organization of KSI and formally established in 2005. It works for rural community development through organizing producer cooperatives.

4. OCeAN (Surabaya, Indonesia)

OCeAN is for "Organic Community Action Network". OCeAN is a partner NGO to ATINA trade company which exports "Eco-Shrimp". OCeAN is responsible for social and community projects in the "Eco-Shrimp" farming areas. Its vision is "to protect of people's life, environment and daily life", and works for improvements in local environment and community as well as for the development and diffusion of organic farming technology. Among wide ranging OCeAN social action projects, planting the Mangrove with local high school students, making and distributing of organic soap which wouldn't pollute shrimp farming ponds and cleaning up the local rivers, are found.

< Inaugural Symposium of APLA >

"Towards the Alternative People's Linkage in Asia"

Tokyo, 17th May 2008

At the symposium, three small-scale farmers from Philippines, East Timor and Japan, with the president of Alter Trade Japan, Ltd. (ATJ), an alternative people's trading company in Japan, exchanged their experiences, discussing



the world wide poverty and environmental destruction brought about by globalization, intensified competition in free market economy, and the increased farmers' difficulties in sustaining their livelihood and their way of life. Chaired by Professor Yoshinori Murai (Waseda University, Japan), they explored what we can do and what we should do, in confronting our common crisis. They found that small-scale farmers in Asia, including those in Japan, are commonly struggling to survive. It was agreed that further opportunities for exchanging of opinions and sharing of experiences is vital in enhancing alternative people's linkages in Asia. The following is a summary of the participants' speech in the symposium.

● From the Starved to the Self-reliant Life



Lito Estama, Chairman of NARB (Nagasi Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries Multi-Purpose Cooperative, Philippines)

I come from a farm in Esperanza, Negros, Philippines. We had worked through as sugar worker since my grandfather's days, and I had been involved in the land struggle since my twenties. Now I am a father with five kids. The name of my former landlord was Benedict family, who was former dictator Marcos' henchman.

When I was working for Benedict, I was nothing but a labourer. I had no rights to decide how to earn my living, or what to grow on the farm land. We did not have enough money to live or to go to school. I wanted to feed my kids with rice, but had no land to grow it. Whenever you wanted to grow your own crops, you needed your landlord's permission which was almost impossible to get. You were not allowed to grow any plant as you wished. We had no choice but to live our life being controlled by the landlord.

Twenty years ago the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program established, and we found ourselves being its beneficiaries. That was an opportunity with which we could possess our own land and become a free peasant farmer from the landlord. We, 76 families altogether, formed a cooperative union constituted by the beneficiaries. Our landlord harassed us one way or another, including the stoppage of water and electricity supply as well as the sack of those blacklisted. They made us starved. The landlord deployed private army to defend their lands and watch our daily life, the tactics which tried to threaten us and make us giving up our rights to the land. Before long, our kids were forced to quit schooling, and no rice became affordable for us.

Although this struggle continued for more than ten years, we 76 families never gave up. If we did, our family life would have been broken up, and our kids would certainly have left the village. There was no choice but to continue to fight.

Meanwhile, we appealed to court. We also went to Manila and the Presidential Palace for directly appealing our case. Finally, in 2003, with the sanction obtained from the Department of Agrarian Reform, we went to our land to crop our sugar cane. The private army shot fire, killed my nephew and two women were wounded.

It was women who supported our land struggle all through. For men were not able to go out of the farm being watched by the landlord, women went to the city to work, did washing, and kept household. We also had support from JCNC, through various channels. Without this support, I would not be here. I would have been killed or migrated somewhere out of Negros to look for some job.

In 2003, we obtained our land certificate, becoming an independent farmer freed from the landlord. We acquired the land of 140 hectares which were further divided into 76 families. A part of the land has been secured as a common land for all of us. We did not have money when we started our own farming. But again, solidarity from Japanese people made it possible for us to start things up. We have managed through with your solidarity and support, which have always been our great hope.

What I expect for APLA is that it provides a platform for small-scale farmers through which we can find our common values with exchanging our ideas and thinking, 'Common values' would certainly cherish the notion that we develop things by ourselves, and that we recognize the importance of people's linkage and solidarity. Without these values that we can share, we cannot go forward. In order to process and sell the products you have grown, you must find an original, unique value which is appealing. I want to learn things through interacting with people from other areas and regions. In the case of the land struggle in East Timor, it might be a good idea that we exchange our experiences in land struggle each other. Mutual help and interaction would surely be valuable.

● **Six Years from East Timor Independence — A Start from Nothing**

Daniel Pereira, KSI (an East Timor NGO for Reconciliation and Social Reform, East Timor)

Hello, everyone. I would like to make a speech in Tetung, the East Timor language, but no one here could understand the language and I will speak in Indonesian with great regret.

East Timor became independent on 20th May 2002. It was a Portuguese colony for 450 years, then ruled by Indonesia as its 26th state for 25 years. During being occupied by Indonesia, we engaged our resistant movement in three ways: diplomatic channel,

underground movement, and armed struggle. The last one means you fight Indonesian army in the forest. I myself was active in the underground political movement.

Now, East Timor has 13 prefectures with 65 local governments. 17 languages are spoken. I have been working as a journalist since Indonesian occupied era, but started working for KSI, an NGO, in 2002. In addition to the NGO activity, I was also involved in students' movement in that I learned how to organize the people. The name KSI is derived from 'stream'; when small streams come together, they become a big river. I wonder this would be one of the ideas APLA members share.

I have been active in the district called Ermera where you can see plenty of coffee beans.



Most people in many villages are farm labourers who live near the coffee fields but without their own land. That's why I started to give my support to their land struggle. I became acquainted with some of the Eastern Timor government officials while I was organizing farmers. They said that I should become a governor or a bureaucrat, but I declined the offers. I would like to be with the people. Our struggle for independence certainly ended, but we have not yet solved the problem of poverty. The fight must go on.

I learned that there was a business concept which shares the concerns and heart of people's NGOs. Some of my colleagues are interested in so-called alternative business. Actually we have been engaged in barter trade of coffee beans and corns between Same city in Manfahi district and Ermera. So far, 10 tons of corns were sent to Ermera and the people who participated in the business earned 200 dollars. East Timor could solve poverty related problems via extending its network with various regions.

Yes, I think we need international solidarity. What JCNC has done in Negros is now being developed in East Timor and Indonesia. In East Timor, we especially want to push forward our land reform movement, and I am confident that the people's experiences in Negros would strengthen and benefit our cause. We should continually pursue what kind of projects shall or will we do.

It might be a good idea that APLA creates an opportunity to give awards to farmers and activists, especially young ones. Let's make the impossible the possible; let's try it together. I hope that we can keep this spirit.

● Linking Asian Small-scale Farmers: Female and Young Peasant Farmers Movement for Locally Produced and Consumed Food

Mitsuko Hikita, Shirataka Nora-no-kai (Nora Collective), Japan



Hello everyone, I am Hikita from Nora-no-kai in Shirataka city, Yamagata prefecture, Japan.

The name "Nora" is originated in "Noppara", the Japanese equivalent to the "uncultivated open field" in English. Japanese young people may not be familiar with this word, but we like it because we can sense more freedom and wildness in this word. Thus we took it as our group's name.

Shirataka is situated in a mountainous area, about one hour drive from Yonezawa, a major southern town in Yamagata. The scale of our rice fields tend to be smaller than average for its mountainous location, so we make our living not just with rice but also with vegetables, fruits and hothouse crops such as tomatoes. It is a traditional, small-scale, mixed and diversified agricultural practice that we are engaged in.

I moved into this area 17years ago. Since then, a lot of things have changed in the area. However, if you take it much longer, say 40 to 50 years, you'll find much more drastic changes occurred. For example, the generation of my husband's parents spent entirely self-sufficient way of life, with self-made bed mattress and agricultural devices. Now it has

gone: you just cannot live that way any longer. The Japanese governments are destroying our farming and agricultural way of life. I will tell you that our village is in crisis.

In Shirataka, quite a few people make their livings on dairy farming. The dairy farmers have to buy animal feed from the US whose prices have been increasing. In particular, the price of corn shot up due to its shortage caused by the growing demands for its use for bio-ethanol. Dairy farmers used to be elite farmers, but now they are in red. Last December they gathered to discuss and protest against the crisis. They finally stood up. The production costs for milk are now higher than its sales costs, and they start to withdraw their savings in order to make their ends meet. They are trying to keep their cows but it means more money will be lost.

Recently in Japan, safety of the imported foods from China has attracted much attention. But there is no sign that the Japanese government took any action which would raise the level of self-sufficiency of domestic food production. This has also caused my serious concern.

During the last 22 years, JCNC has brought about many excellent results. How shall we develop our work further? In the past we supported in creating various self-sufficient local food networks in Asia. I now strongly feel that it is deadly important to develop our own self-sufficient local food networks here in Japan. Perhaps, we could speak to Daniel and Lito on an equal footing only after achieving this. APLA should encourage, expand and enhance for developing that kind of networks and linkages among the people.

I myself, as a JCNC support member, have been supporting sugar workers in Negros. The support made it possible that Negros workers becoming independent small-scale farmers. Now, APLA must nurture various kinds of cooperative work and project with Japanese farmers. How shall we produce and feed our own foods? – that is the question I would like to share and solve with you.

In the past 22 years, JCNC history strived forward with Japanese consumers. However, you cannot find much effort made in creating the interaction between food producers themselves in Japan and the other areas of Asia. I hope that APLA would encourage and support Japanese farmers go to see Asian farmers themselves. In addition, APLA would give its priority to the work which is able to enrich our life through farming. Finding, supporting and networking the people who could make our lives rich might change our materialistic culture as well as the way of civilization. I will try myself this way.

● **Beyond Fair Trade and Further: Our 20 Years Experience of People’s Banana Trade** **Masahiko Hotta, President of Alter Trade Japan Ltd.**

We call our trade business “people to people trade”, which started to gain currency in Japan in 1989. The title of this symposium is “Beyond Fair Trade to Alternative Trade” which is a rather overstretched expression. It is not our intention to put “alternative trade” against “fair trade”. Basically, all the trades among ordinary citizens constitute as fair trade. Our trade is not a commercial trade which inevitably has



inbuilt exploiter–exploited relationship. Our trade started with the support from mothers who were the members of a consumers’ co–operative union. It did depend on the heart and soul of those mothers. Japanese consumers’ movement developed around the issue of food encountered the starvation prevailed in Negros; this is how our people to people trade was born.

In the last few years quite a few food–related scandals were exposed such as poisoned frozen Chinese Gyoza dumplings and intentionally mislabeled quality beef. However this is not a new story. You can find the same problems in the 70s and 80s, and it was the background against which consumers’ co–operative unions formed. Minamata mercury poisoning disease, arsenic poisoning caused by the Morinaga Drink Corporation’s contaminated milk, “Kanemi–Yusho” poisoning case caused by contaminated rice oil — these food–related scandals all occurred under the post–war rapid economic expansion and caused unbearable pain and sacrifices on those who consumed the foods. In Japan, because the corporate profit was given priority in the pursuit of economic growth, people’s lives and its environment were ignored and devastated.

Those consumers who have been supporting JCNC started their own food movement in order to avoid being victimized, and succeeded in establishing safe and sound direct trade routes with producers. Then they encountered the starvation in Negros. Actually, they visited Negros by themselves and came back to Japan still feeling the starved babies they held in their arms in Negros. They asked themselves — “how shall we go forward with them?” That is how the idea of “people to people trade” was born. The Japanese consumers decided that they would buy food produced by Negros people. In doing so, they also anticipated a possibility of changing the workings of society.

It is surely foolish that the amateurs who have no experiences in the relevant fields should start the import business of bananas. Veteran specialists predicted it would be a disaster. We ignored all the warnings. Our logic was like this: because we were stood by the consumers who determined to buy out all the products, the thing we had to do was just deliver Negros bananas to Japan. Without their solidarity with the people in Negros, this “people to people trade”, an almost miracle story delivering Negros bananas to Japanese people, would never put into practice. It began with our deep desire — to create a new trade system, to change our way of life not just in Negros but also in Japan, and to generate our own decent economy by ourselves.

Now, I’d like to draw your attention to another story. In Japan, after 1965, self–sufficient and locally produced and consumed food system was gradually displaced by a large scale, bulk sales, and long distant food system which would suit to the consumers in big cities. On the other hand, in the 17th century, in Indonesia and East Timor, the East Indian Company began their trading activity, destroying people’s village life. They broke up people’s self–sufficient rich life in order to make them grow coffee beans and other types of food for consumption in Holland. As a workforce, the peasant farmers were exploited and had to live like Lito told us earlier. At the roots of our contemporary globalized economic system, you

can see the historical domination of the south by the north began in the 17th century. When we take it into our consideration, it becomes apparent that the people in the south are the victims. You cannot redress the north–south disparities just by buying coffee beans from the south as a fair trade. This is a great irony: while it is possible for the people in the South to become a little wealthier in the result of fair trade to Japan, it makes their life more dependent on Japanese consumers. It will not bring about self–sufficient way of life for the people in the south whatever they produce and sell their coffee beans.

Buying bananas or coffee beans is just a means among many. The real question is how to recover the rich land with plenty of greens. In order to achieve that ideal, peasant farmers try hard to produce and sell their own agricultural products at local morning markets. APLA is planning to pass its own experiences in Negros to the people in Indonesia, East Timor and other South–East Asian countries. Underneath, there is a wild dream of creating the people’s international network for independent and self–sufficient way of life. I would like make it clear that we can survive only in the solidarity among the people; we promote associating ourselves, irrespective of the national boundaries. APLA would strive forward to it.

Our common concerns are how to live, how and what to eat, and how and what to produce. We have been challenging the unthinkable for 22 years, and now we have some results. Nowadays I sometimes happen to think that our way might not be too outrageous to go.

We need knitting an alternative linkage or network: a sustainable system of sowing of seeds, growing of plants, and eating of the products; a practical management of the year–around movement of the people, products and technology. In East Timor, there is a project supplying a lorry to change the people’s lives. This lorry, however, takes you to the sea port. It is the same in the Philippines. The economic system in which every roads leads to the sea port has been established. We have to challenge this system and create an alternative relational linkage among the people. That is our idea of community trade or exchange.

●It is Good News that the Japanese Economy is Declining

Yoshinori Murai, Honourary Professor of Waseda University, Japan



JCNC was dissolved and the new organization APLA was born. The APLA’s vision is much more ambitious. This inauguration symposium has fully shown its colour.

New linkage with the people of East Timor was one of the main topics in the symposium. JCNC started its life during the peak period of economic bubble in Japan. 20 years have passed since then and now Japan occupies the 15th position in the GDP league table. This fall from the great economic power is not a bad thing but rather a chance for us. Japanese agricultural villages have been suffocated because of Japan’s rapid economic growth. The growth was made possible by its industrialization. More economic growth and

foreign currencies meant more imported goods. Irrespective of its usefulness and necessity, we bought and imported as much as we could. It would probably be too optimistic that we could reclaim our lost land and sea to ourselves here in Japan. Still, it seems pretty good for the third world countries if the first world countries like Japan are declining in its economy. In that situation, we have more chances of being linked together in an equal position.

Before, there were various unique and original trade networks in Southeast Asia. Each region had its own richness. Those were destroyed by colonization and recent globalization. In Japan, while globalization advances, economic and social gaps among the people are widening. Daniel talked about barter, and he said that we should start where we can, there is nothing we cannot achieve. I agree with him. I find it appealing. In linking together with Philippines, Negros, East Timor and others, I hope that APLA will bring about more happy life for us. APLA should show the way to lead to ATJ, not vice versa. I think it is our mission to create an alternative social and economic system whereby young generations could live their life fully.

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Introduction of APLA member (1) ~ Nora-no-kai ~

What is Nora- no-kai (Nora Collective) ?

1. Members

Organized in July 2005, “Nora-no-kai” (Nora Collective) is a group of 11 farmers in Shirataka town, Yamagata Prefecture, north of Japan. Diversity is our feature. Six women and five men ages from 20s to 60s. Six members were born locally and the rest are from different places in Japan (Miyazaki in the far south, Shizuoka and Tokyo in the central mainland, Fukushima in the north). Some are experienced organic farmers growing rice, vegetables, raising chickens. Younger members started farming only recently.

2. What to do

(1) Farming

We organically grow various kinds of vegetables, cereals and beans, which we sell as a group to consumers and consumers' cooperatives. On our leased land we grow beans, black rice, “egoma” (perilla), and some other vegetables for processing.

(2) Processing

We have various kinds of products: pickles, vegetable soups, “miso”, rice cakes, sweets

and etc. There are two processing facilities, Meguria and Yuyu-sha. At Meguria rice cakes (winter season only) and sweets are made and the rest of our products are made at Yuyu-sha. Developing new products is not an easy task and we try to make use of traditional processing techniques (we call this "grand mothers' knowledge") found in our local areas.

(3) Selling

•Vegetables and Rice: We sell vegetables and rice packed in a box ("Nora Pack") and they are delivered regularly and directly to the consumers from June to December.

•Processed Products: Processed products are sold on orders. We send a list of products available to our registered consumers (about 300) every other month. They make orders to us by mail, fax or e-mail and their ordered items are sent by direct home delivery. Bulk orders come from several consumers' cooperatives in Tokyo and its vicinity.

3. Start-up and working funds

Due to the shortage of our own finance, we asked our friends to lend us some money to start up Nora-no-kai. Within one year we collected enough funds to construct Meguria and Yuyu-sha. The collected funds were also made to use for purchasing the processing equipments. The funds will be returned to the contributors after the year 2011.

4. How Nora-no-kai works

Nora-no-kai farmer members are being paid equally by the hourly rate when they engage in the processing work. They also supply raw materials (vegetables, rice, beans and etc.) for processing for the contract prices.

All the Nora members meet one or two times a month to discuss about farming plans, new processing items and other important agendas to be tackled.