

March 18, 2020

**Urgent Appeal following the COVID-19 Outbreak
—Responding to instances of discrimination and antforeignism,
we hereby request for the human rights and medical/financial
protection of immigrants, ethnic minorities, and marginalized
populations—**

As COVID-19 (Coronavirus disease 2019) spreads all over the world, more cases of discriminatory and antforeign words and deeds toward immigrants and ethnic minorities are being reported both domestically and internationally. In Europe, people from Asia and of Asian descent are being physically abused and, in Japan, Chinese people are banned from some establishments. While each country is imposing travel restrictions on certain countries and discussing potential “risks” of people moving across borders, immigrants and ethnic minorities are being connected to the “risks,” treated as “suspicious,” and targeted by xenophobia. At the same time, there are quite a few technical intern trainees and irregular migrant workers who have been fired or laid off due to the current economic recession resulting from the coronavirus outbreak. We are greatly concerned about the developing racism and xenophobia that have accompanied the outbreak of COVID-19.

Dr. Mike Ryan, who leads the WHO’s Health Emergencies Programme, addressed that travel restrictions, which are being imposed in many countries, should not be abused since a travel restriction is only a part of the holistic approach toward disease prevention.¹ In addition, Michelle Bachelet, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, indicated that human rights need to be placed at the forefront and center of any coronavirus countermeasure.² In her statement, Bachelet asks us to pay attention to the way those who are deemed vulnerable in society are treated, by asserting, “our efforts to combat this virus won’t work unless we approach it holistically, which means taking great care to protect the most vulnerable and neglected people in society, both medically and economically.” Moreover, she requested the governments that are being affected by COVID-19 to take necessary countermeasures against xenophobic and stigmatizing activities.

Although the WHO has adopted its policy not to use the names of specific locations and people for the nomenclature of infectious diseases in order to prevent potential discrimination and disgrace, in Japan, some politicians have been referring to COVID-19 as the “Wuhan Virus.” In addition, the City of Saitama decided to provide complimentary

¹Tokyo Shimbun March 17, 2020

<https://www.tokyo-np.co.jp/article/world/list/202003/CK2020031702000278.html>

² OHCHR [“Coronavirus: Human rights need to be front and centre in response, says” Bachelet](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25668&LangID=E)
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masks for employees of kindergartens and nursing schools in its municipality; however, the Korean kindergartens were excluded from their list at first (the decision was subsequently overturned due to many complaints received from citizens). As shown in these examples, we are witnessing increasing levels of discrimination and demagoguery inflicted by public institutions and civil servants.

In response to the current perturbing situation, we urge both the national and local governments to present a clear stance that COVID-19-related discrimination and antireignism will not be permitted, and to guarantee the human rights of immigrants and ethnic minorities and the protection of marginalized populations. In order not to leave anyone behind, information needs to be available in multiple languages, and in line with human rights standards, all the necessary services need to be provided. We also demand the government, news media, and every citizen to provide information that is correct and just.

In the midst of ongoing discrimination and antireignism, we believe trust and solidarity beyond borders and ethnicities are needed, not the spread of the illusion that we can resolve this problem by closing the border.

In solidarity,

Solidarity Network with Migrants Japan