

The DPI (Disabled Peoples' International) Women's Network Japan was launched in 1986 to amplify the voices of disabled women by connecting organizations across the country.

The group was founded by citizen advocate Higuchi Keiko and activists Asaka Yuho and Tsutsumi Aiko. Keiko, who has also served as councilwoman in a Tokyo suburb, was bedridden with spinal tuberculosis as a teenager; Yuho and Aiko are wheelchair mobile.

Together, the three set about promoting independent living for disabled women.

Discrimination has long hampered the social integration of people with disabilities pressured them not to have children, while normally abled women have faced very different social pressures. Although clashes sometimes erupted between these disparate groups, working for common goals through the Women's Network helped bridge their differences.

The group also advocated for the repeal of the Eugenic Protection Act, which gave the government broad powers to "prevent the birth of defective offspring." At the 1994 UN International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, Yuho spoke out strongly against such discriminatory language. International pressure helped to bring about revision of the law two years later, resulting in the Maternal Protection Act.

Women's sexuality and reproductive rights continue to be subjected to control through the Criminalization of abortion, as well as policies aimed at preventing the birth of disabled children. On a positive note, however, revisions in 2004 to laws against domestic violence included explicit acknowledgement that disabled women have a right to protection.

The network temporarily ceased its activities as regional groups developed, but members who had continued a study group reactivated it in 2007 on the occasion of the DPI World Assembly in Korea. Today, the network continues to bridge the disabled/non-disabled gap by bringing together women with differing abilities, experiences and sexualities to work for a common purpose.

Recent activities have included drafting city ordinances barring discrimination on the basis of disability, and submitting recommendations for the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Together, participants continue to probe what it means to be disabled and to be a woman.

The source;

Sisters! The Women's Calendar 2010

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Published by Workshop for Women JO-JO