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# ASIA WOMEN LEADERS INTERVIEW

Fusako Yanase, Honorary Chairperson, AAR Save the Relief

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## **Q 1. Would you tell us about the current situation and challenges in Ukraine. as you continue to provide support?**

AAR's first priority is to provide humanitarian aid.

This invasion is a violation of the UN Charter and international humanitarian law.

We are praying for a ceasefire as soon as possible, while feeling angry about why so many young people are dying in another war, as we see soldiers on the front lines.

Currently, we are supporting reliefs in Poland, a monastery in the western Ternopil region of Ukraine, and Moldova, where NGOs are divided into different areas, such as medical care, food procurement, shelters for reliefs, etc. Each NGO is working in its own area of expertise. The reality is that in Poland, Japanese NPOs and NGOs are providing support where they have a connection.

Poland is currently not in a state where the UN is coming in and handling the situation. It is very difficult to host a family for more than a month. Many of them are elderly, mothers and their children, and some are separated from their fathers, which is heartbreaking. It is in this situation that we are pushing forward with our activities.

In fact, those who are able to become reliefs are those who are relatively well off financially. Also, if you are not in good health, you cannot become reliefs.

The hardest hit will be those who are left behind in Ukraine. There are many disabled people, elderly people, and those who are taking care of them. I believe that we must support them as soon as possible after the ceasefire.

The Ministry of Justice announced that 664 people were evacuated from Ukraine to Japan between March 2 and April 19. The issue of resettlement in Japan is how to coexist with the Japanese people in the future. Until now, we have only accepted those with skills. Of course, Japan is not a nation of immigrants, so our direction has been to accept people with skills as a labor force, but we are now starting to think about how Japanese society can coexist and change with foreigners by accepting people with whom we have a connection...with this in mind. I am now starting to think about how Japanese society can coexist and change with foreigners.

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## **Q 2. Could you be more specific about how your donation will be used?**

AAR is a non-political, non-religious, non-biased organization. But at the moment, we are supplying goods through a monastery in Poland.

We have sent a donation in advance so that the staff can get what they need before they go there from Japan. When they arrive there, AAR staff are not allowed in Ukraine.

After checking the luggage, they ask the parents of the school attached to the church to drive them out. We don't go with a big line of trucks. They would send a number of private vehicles, which would take about two days to enter the Ukraine and deliver the luggage. Then they come back.

We have a rotation so that we can deliver twice a week.

Emergency food, medicine, diapers, and other daily necessities are procured.

The circle of support from the local community is also growing.

As for support for Moldova, since it is a socialist country, there are sanatoriums all over the place, and many of the displaced people are being accepted at these facilities. There are space, -kitchens, staffs who work there, but when you open the fridge and there's nothing, so we need to supply food to eat.

As long as we have the materials, reliable stuffs are waiting there!

We deliver what they need right now. I would like to say that we are doing is very simple and clear. I hope that you will support organization like us that we can directly support those who are in need.

**[Click here for Ukraine Emergency Assistance](https://lp.aarjapan.gr.jp/ukraine/)**

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### **Q 3. What were the problems you encountered in your activities?**

Yes, there have been many.

We had to solve them one at a time, one by one, and we were determined to do so with sincerity and without haste.

The most painful experience for us was the death of one of our staff members. They died in traffic accidents, from infectious diseases such as malaria, and from the aftershocks of the earthquake. Such a loss of life should not happen, and we are always on the alert, informing all concerned and urging them to be careful.

As for our projects, we have been supporting the independence of people with disabilities in Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, and other countries for decades, but we have not been able to hand over the project to the local people. It is difficult financially and even if we nurture human resources, it is difficult without financial support from AAR. In Japan, public support for people with disabilities has been enhanced, so it is possible to continue the supports, but in this region, there is no social security even for able-bodied people, and moreover, there is no public support for people with disabilities.

It is necessary for the government to improve its overall financial capacity, and I think this will be difficult unless it is able to properly measure tax revenues.

The reality is that the special class of people are rich beyond the reach of ordinary Japanese people, but the disparity is so great that it cannot be compared to the disparity in Japan, and the vulnerable people are increasingly being left behind. I am always wondering if there is some way we can shift the entire project to the locals.

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**Q 4. We call leaders who has continued to have a lot of influence.  
What has been important to you as a women leader? What are your beliefs  
and values?**

I am not a leader or anything, but since I started, I am responsible for managing the organization, so I put humanitarian assistance first and solved one problem at a time. Before I knew it, it had been 40 years.

So many different people have come through the doors of AAR. I observed each and every one of them, wondering what I could add to them to make their activities better. Maybe I was always watching them. Each and every one of the young people involved were truly wonderful.

For example, Yukie Osa, our President, who had just graduated from graduate school, joined us as a volunteer for Indochina relief because she was good at mathematics and wanted to teach mathematics. That led her to go to the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, and human security became her research theme.

Another story, I sent a man to the International Criminal Court, where he is now working, and to the media, where he is working while working with AAR, and I thought that AAR might have become a passing point, a place where I could have a good encounter with people. If you continue to do this, people will come back to you 10 years later to tell you what they are doing now. They will tell me that the organization has grown to the point where they can run their own company and donate to it. I am more than happy that there are so many people who have told me this and think that the origin of each one was here, the organization.

The Indochina relief at that time all became Japanese citizens. They donated a lot of money to AAR and gave us scholarships at that time. They told us that they gave us the opportunity to study, and that they are who they are today because of that. When I hear people say that, I wonder if we were able to use their donations properly, and I am truly grateful for that. Looking back, I wonder if it was my role to provide that place. You may call me a leader because I have been doing this for a long time, but I guess I have just been connecting the things in front of me, one by one.

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**Q 5. Please tell us what has been the driving force for you to keep going for 40 years, with so many difficulties standing in your way each time, and yet you have continued to do so.**

If we had something we could make, we might just improve that product. But the Association for Aid and Relief, Inc. has nothing to sell. We spent our days just asking everyone for help.

We started by my father's asking to use a room in our house as an office and let my daughter do it.

I was only about 30 years old at the time, had two newborn children, and was able to get by financially. After that, my father passed away and I was the only one left in charge, and if I said I would quit, the association would go under collapse. We have already collected over 100 million in donations, and every day people from the media come, people from Indochina come, and people say, "I want to send a donation, what should I do? I had no choice but to handle it.

I had to deal with the children's entrance examinations, taking care of my parents, and I might have had my hands full. But we found people who would take care of our children and cooperate with us. We started out like that, but I think the reason we are still able to operate like this today is very much due to the fact that we did not have a large number of staff and that there are no factions. We don't want to be biased toward politics, but we are able to connect and have relationships with people from all walks of life.

I am not a member of the board of directors, but when I have a problem like this, there is always someone there who will say, "I am good at that!". Each one of us has a wide network of contacts, and perhaps that is why we have been able to gather such people. Internal division, I find it strange that there was no such thing at all. Maybe it was just that each of us was in charge of our area of expertise. I guess I just did the best I could in my limited position. There were times when I felt like I was young, like I was moving without sleeping. That's how I feel.

I think it is really hard work to accumulate trust.

I think it is just a matter of responding to each person with sincerity. I think it is just a matter of taking care of what is in front of us. When I happened to appear in the media this time about Ukraine, I received a donation from a classmate. A boy who happened to sit next to me when I was in elementary school. The guy who sat next to me in my first grade classroom at elementary school turned out to be a 73 year old man. He said, "You've been doing well for a long time. That was the moment when I thought, "Oh, I haven't done anything wrong."

But everyone can change from today, even if they are doing bad things. I know that we can all change from today. So, I am always reflecting on how I can be more careful with each and every one of you from today.



Association for Aid and Relief AAR  
Japan  
Honorary Chairperson Fusako Yanase /  
Japan

### Message to you now

~YouTube/ Ukraine's National Anthem  
"Ukraine shall not perish" Message from  
AAR Japan Honorary President Yanase +  
Tokyo New City Orchestra~.  
<https://youtu.be/y2ovQT9CoPg>

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<https://lp.aarjapan.gr.jp/ukraine/>

Born in Tokyo in 1948. In 1979, she participated in the Association for Aid and Relief (AAR Japan) and had become the secretary general after just serving 6 months since its establishment. Since November 2000, she had served as the President of the organization.

Appointed chairman in July 2009.

In 1996, YANASE received recognition from the Minister of Foreign Affairs for her years of dedication to the field of international cooperation.

The picture book "Not Mines, but Flowers" (written by Fusako Yanase, pictured by Syomei Yoh), which supports the movement to ban landmines, won the Japan Picture Book Award / Reader's Award. 620,000 copies have been published. Currently, Honorary Chairperson of the Association for Aid and Relief (AAR JAPAN). Refugee Examination Counselor of the Ministry of Justice.



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ASIA WOMEN LEADERS FORUM

