

Foreword

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In the last several decades, women in Japan and the United States have assumed increasingly important roles in the transformation of their societies. In both countries women have become leaders in their communities, promoting voluntarism and seeking to address problems in the areas of community development, childcare, education, public health, the environment, care for the aged, and other issues. However, in spite of the many common concerns faced by women in these two countries, there have been relatively few opportunities for Japanese and US women leaders at the local and national levels to meet, discuss issues, or join forces in addressing common problems.

In order to stimulate greater dialogue among women in these two countries, the Institute of International Education (IIE) initiated the *Japan-US Women Leaders Dialogue* in cooperation with the Japan Center for International Exchange (JCIE) and with support from the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership (CGP) and other donors. The Dialogue was created in order to provide opportunities for Japanese and US women leaders to exchange ideas on major social issues facing their communities and to discuss the role women play in addressing these issues through leadership in nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), citizens groups, and voluntary service activities. The program was designed to enhance mutual understanding between the two societies and to stimulate the development of networks through which the participants in the Dialogue would be able to work together on issues of professional concern.

In the first phase of the project, a delegation of six women leaders from various regions of the United States traveled to Japan during the period January 23-February 5, 1993. The delegation visited Tokyo, Yokohama, Fukuoka, and Kanazawa to meet with their counterparts and learn directly about Japanese society and culture while sharing with their Japanese counterparts their experiences in the United States. During the second phase of the Dialogue, a reciprocal delegation of six Japanese women leaders visited the United States from June 6-19 of the

same year. Following a similar program outline, these leaders visited Los Angeles, Spokane, Chicago, and New York to meet with related counterparts in these locations.

Throughout both parts of this exchange, the Japanese and US delegations were able to deepen their understanding of the host culture and society. Participants have also begun promoting follow-up activities to further their relations. Although there may be differences concerning specific issues confronting both nations, a great number of similarities were discovered in the issues faced by women in both societies, such as the role women play in social reform. Although both societies have been pursuing very different approaches to such fundamental issues, it was also realized that individuals in both countries have a great deal to learn from each other. Another benefit of this project has been that those striving to foster the development of a US-Japan community of concerned individuals have been provided with new insights, thus the basis for a cooperative network of leaders to promote such relations can hopefully be established.

The delegation members of both sides, serving as individual representatives of their respective communities, have by now begun to share experiences gained in this program with others in their communities. It is hoped that this small circle of 12 individuals will gradually spread its influence throughout the US-Japan community as a whole. In addition, in order to share these experiences with a wider audience, the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership has provided supplementary funding to produce a report providing a record of this exchange initiative.

Through the cooperative activities of IIE and JCIE, we hope that the ties between women community leaders in the United States and Japan will become an established and viable network that will provide a stepping stone to full-fledged activities in communities in both countries—supported by citizens groups and nongovernmental and nonprofit organizations (NGOs and NPOs). In light of such needs, both IIE and JCIE plan to promote the continuation of this project with a second exchange of women leaders. During the first project, more than 200 individuals representing a wide array of organizations became involved in this endeavor. We would like to express our deepest gratitude to each and every one of these individuals. In addition, we would also like to express our gratitude to the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership, as well as those US institutions and corporations for their support of the aforementioned initiatives. Our appreciation goes out to these sponsors and individuals. It is our hope that these individuals and organizations will also consider assisting us in meeting the future needs and goals of our joint effort to build a strong and ongoing Japan-US Women's Network.