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New Movement of the International Whaling Commission

By OKAWARA Yoshio

The Intersessional Meeting on the Future of International Whaling Commission (IWC) which was held in London came to an end on March 8 with the statement condemning the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, the US based group of environmental conservation, for its dangerous actions, such as hurling bottles filled with dangerous chemicals at a Japanese whaling research vessel, *Nisshin Maru*, which was engaged in research activities in the Antarctic Ocean. This statement called upon the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society to refrain from dangerous actions as the IWC did "not condone and in fact condemn any actions that cause a risk to human life and property in relation to the activities of vessels at sea." Even though there were previous cases of extreme and violent anti-whaling activities by environmental conservation groups including Greenpeace, this was the first time for the IWC to publicly criticize such activities by mentioning the name of a specific group.

It was said that some anti-whaling countries offered a compromise proposal at the said Intersessional Meeting which requested Japan to suspend scientific research whaling in the Antarctic Ocean while allowing Japan to resume a limited scale of coastal whaling of Japan and that pro-whaling countries and anti-whaling countries such as the UK and Holland negotiated this proposal informally. The IWC adopted a moratorium on commercial whaling in 1982. Japan has been conducting whaling for scientific purposes in the Antarctic Ocean since 1987, which is based on the decision of the IWC. According to the results of the Japanese research, the number of some species of whales has recovered significantly and there is now a concern that the increase of propagation in some whale species unexpectedly leads to the decrease of the number of fish.

Even though anti-whaling countries still hold a negative attitude towards the whaling even for scientific research purpose, it should be noted that the above-mentioned proposal was informally discussed at the Intersessional Meeting this time. It was also reported that this compromise plan would be proposed again at the Annual Meeting to be held in May or June in Chile. Regarding coastal whaling, Japan has asserted for a long time that it has been practiced with a long historical background. There is an example of traditional whaling accepted by the IWC, which is the case of the Eskimos on the Alaskan coast. We should continue to pay attention to how the situation will develop from now after the London meeting.

When I was Japanese Ambassador to the US in early 1980s, I visited places all around the US in order to give a speech. Americans like to make a remark during the Q&A session after the speech of a guest speaker. What flustered me was that there was always someone who stood up to argue for anti-whaling. Furthermore, I was surprised that I faced anti-whaling argument even in such states as Montana and West Virginia which do not have sea. It seemed that they have been taught at school that whale was a clever and cute animal so it should be protected. They insisted that whaling was a cruel activity and it should not be allowed at all. I explained and insisted that Japan was conducting only scientific research whaling of limited scope which was authorized by the IWC. But nobody cared to understand it and the situation did not change. The arrival of black ships of Commodore Perry in 1853 to Uraga, near Yokohama, was aimed at asking Japan to open the country so that the US could secure the supply base of fuel and water for whaling vessel. I wondered if Americans have forgotten the historical fact that the US used to be a big whaling country and then made a complete volte-face to anti-whaling later.

It is regrettable that there have been so many number of violence cases by environmental conservation groups such as Greenpeace and Sea Shepherd Conservation Society in support of anti-whaling. But the fact that compromise efforts have started to be sought is of deep interest for us. I hope that we can utilize this kind of new momentum and that we can reach a realistic resolution at the IWC which should be scientifically based and accepted even by anti-whaling countries.

(This is the English translation of an article by Ambassador OKAWARA Yoshio, Chairman of the Global Forum of Japan, which originally appeared on the BBS "Giron-Hyakushutsu" of GFJ on March 19, 2008.)