

## **JICA and Crisis Management: 34 Years**

**By NISHIKAWA Megumi**

It has been 34 years since the establishment of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), but not many people know that 217 people have died overseas in the course of their work supporting development. These 217 people who died due to sickness, accident or mishap include JICA staff, as well as those working for the youth and senior wings of the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers, and specialists sent abroad. Those claimed by illness number 100, accident 88, and mishap 10. Around half died to illness, but in September last year while sightseeing in Tunis a senior volunteer from the JICA Tunisia office and two staff from the Beijing office died when their car rolled. The previous November, a 69-year old senior volunteer sent to assist with program production at Mongolia's national television service was murdered during a burglary.

At present, the JICA organization has close to 4000 people posted to developing and third world countries. Away from large cities, the security situation, standard of living and sanitation are poor and many precautions are taken to reduce the risks as much as possible. Recruits receive training (for around 2 months) before being dispatched, orientation upon arrival, regular patrols of living quarters by security firms and reinforced doors and windows. Second opinions can be obtained from 14 part-time doctors on constant standby at JICA headquarters, and charter flights can be arranged in lieu of regular services in case of emergency. These comprehensive steps are the result of the lessons learned from the sacrifice of 217 people.

That is to say, JICA has a history of building crisis management systems. Particularly, there were two major events as key lessons. The first was in 1991 when a far-left guerrilla group shot to death 3 agricultural specialists sent to Peru. The second was in 1999 when armed Islamist extremists kidnapped 4 mining engineers sent to Kyrgyz in Central Asia (they were released after 2 months). The 1991 incident occurred as far-left groups opposing the Fujimori government targeted Japanese, thus shocking the naïve mindset of Japanese volunteers who thought that good work would be rewarded with gratitude. In the Kyrgyz incident, American specialists working in the same area withdrew based on danger warnings from the U.S. Based on these lessons, JICA set up in 1991 a security measures office and in 1999 a security information office to independently gather and analyze local information and create a crisis management system. The offices currently release

independent regional security assessments which are different from the travel alerts at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.

Under President OGATA Sadako, the importance of crisis management has increased as JICA has expanded the regions it provides reconstruction assistance and peace-building. For example, JICA works together with the UN High Commission on Refugees and practices crisis management in the Thai jungle with exercises to acquire practical knowledge and techniques of self-defence. JICA uses bullet-proof cars in Afghanistan and the Palestinian Authority. Development support that focuses on people is not all dreamy idealism.

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