

Dear all,

Greetings from Akishima City, Tokyo.

I am MORINAGA Taro, the newly appointed Director of the United Nations Asia and Far East Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (UNAFEI). It is a great pleasure and honour for me to greet you all on this homepage.

A bit about myself; I have been working as a government attorney of Japan since 1994. After serving as a field prosecutor in district public prosecutors' offices in several different areas, I started my career in the field of international cooperation in 2003 by joining the International Cooperation Department (ICD) of the Research and Training Institute, Ministry of Justice. Since then, with some short intervals during which I worked for the prosecution service, I have been engaged in the work of ICD and UNAFEI most of the time, serving as a professor, deputy director and director. During these years, I also had an opportunity to work in Hanoi, Vietnam, as a chief advisor of a legal technical assistance project run by the Japan International Cooperation Agency for a period of almost three years from 2004 to 2007. My recent transfer was from the position of ICD Director to UNAFEI Director, requiring me to move just a few meters from one room to another on the same floor of the same building here in Akishima City, Tokyo. I am quite familiar with what UNAFEI is doing as a UN-affiliated institution and as the oldest UN Program Network Institute (PNI) because I served as UNAFEI's Deputy Director for three and a half years from April 2014 to October 2017 up until the time when UNAFEI moved from its old location in Fuchu City to where we are right now.

Having assumed the top position at UNAFEI during the Coronavirus pandemic, it seems obligatory to say a little bit about how the pandemic is affecting the duties of UNAFEI staff members. As many of you know, since its inception way back in 1962, UNAFEI's main function has been to conduct training courses for crime prevention and criminal justice practitioners gathering from all over the world at its facility here in Tokyo. UNAFEI has always been proud of organizing rather big, high-quality training courses attended by participants from many different countries who not only learn issues at the forefront of criminal justice from top-notch lecturers but also improve themselves by passionate and intense discussions among each other by way of sharing their space and time together – living together, literally – in the same facility, and creating personal relationships, definitely precious assets for them. And this has been only possible by physically being together at UNAFEI. But all this is now made impossible by COVID-19.

While the large-scale international training courses are no doubt the center-pillars of UNAFEI's work, they are not the only activities UNAFEI is conducting. UNAFEI is doing more. More than ever, UNAFEI has been requested to render technical assistance in the field of criminal justice and offender rehabilitation to specific countries or regions and has actively responded to such needs of its clients. Needless to say, such activities cannot be implemented without thorough joint research and continued face-to-face dialogues with people of our client countries and counterpart institutions which always require frequent mutual visitation. But this also is impossible at the moment.

However, UNAFEI is not standing still. Now it is moving forward with alternative measures and making full use of modern equipment and technology. Though online seminars and training courses can never substitute for in-person attendance at such events, we still do a lot. The very popular UNCAC training course this year in autumn will be held online. You will see how UNAFEI overcomes the inherent obstacles to international online events – time differences and weekly work schedules. Plus, the active utilization of online conference systems, on-demand learning materials and more skillful internet communication enables us to add more value to our conventional way of doing business and makes training courses, seminars and workshops more efficient and effective. The skills we acquired under the restrictions posed by COVID-19 will definitely be very useful in the post-COVID era. I can easily imagine, for example, when designing a training course here in Japan, we will be able to make full use of online systems for activities like preparatory meetings and pre-seminars, as well as follow-up sessions which we would have had to conduct by actual visits. This will make the core part of our training courses more effective and fruitful than ever before.

Nevertheless, everybody at UNAFEI is dreaming about welcoming international participants from various countries at the front entrance of our building, shaking hands with and hugging them. All of us are longing for the days to come when we will be able to travel to our client countries, have good discussions sitting at the same table wherever it may be – preferably accompanied by good local food and drinks. But believe me, it won't be long until then. The night is long that never finds the day. It's always darkest before the dawn. We'll see you soon.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name 'Morinaga Taro' in Japanese characters (森永太郎).

MORINAGA Taro  
Director, UNAFEI