

The 148th International Training Course
Drug Offender Treatment: New Approaches to an Old Problem

Prof. Yuichiro WAKIMOTO

“This is not another earthquake. It has never shaken like this since I came up to Tokyo!”

On the day of the Great East Japan Earthquake, crouching under my desk and gazing at the floor that seemed to tremble endlessly, I felt a horribly ominous feeling.

After what seemed like a long time, I crawled out from under the desk, with dust all over my trousers, and went to make sure that the Kenyan participants staying with us were not injured or hurt. Thankfully they were not. Shortly afterwards, as I tried to busily and hastily arrange their safe trip back home to Africa, I noticed my supervisor watching the breaking news with concern across his face.

“What is he looking at? The nuclear power plant in Fukushima is damaged?! This is going to be bad, isn’t it?”

Will the 148th Course be affected?

Unfortunately, my forebodings proved right. Shortly after the quake, words like “cancellation”, “suspension” and “postponement” were heard everywhere in Tokyo, and the schedule of the 148th Course that I had painstakingly arranged for became a mere blank page. I later learned that quite a few international academic meetings in Tokyo scheduled for that time were actually cancelled, suspended or postponed due to the aftermath of the quake.

The UNAFEI 148th International Training Course was designed to provide participants with expertise regarding “treatment of drug dependent offenders”. The large number of drug offenders and their high recidivism/relapse rate are a source of headache for criminal justice practitioners all over the world, and they pose serious challenges in developed and developing countries alike. Our plan was to look into this old problem from new perspectives, the key words being “cognitive behavioural therapies”, “therapeutic communities”, “systematic evaluation of programmes”,

“evidence-based programmes” and “drug courts”: terms used with increasing frequency.

After a series of painful and desperate efforts to catch up on the logistical arrangements, we managed to implement the Course, with the Opening Ceremony held on 11 May as originally planned. As it turned out, ten overseas participants and observers from Asia and Africa and eight Japanese participants were attending, in almost the same manner as previous Courses.

We were fortunate to have an excellent line up of lecturers. Reflecting the multi-disciplinary nature of the course topic, we invited lecturers from varying fields including clinical psychology, medical science, criminal justice administration, and legal studies as well as practitioners of the Ministry of Justice.

Field experiences supplemented the lectures. Participants observed a real-life session of a treatment programme for drug addicts, conducted a mock urine testing, and experienced a “caravan car”, a bus equipped with various tools for anti-drug awareness-raising.

Considering the importance of partnerships with public and private organizations outside of the criminal justice circles, we also arranged for visits to a psychiatric hospital, a public mental health welfare centre, a halfway house, and a private self-help group of ex-drug addicts.

As part of the Course’s extra-curricular activities, local volunteers organized a traditional Japanese tea ceremony for the participants, and local host families invited them to visit their homes and dine together. The participants also enjoyed (window) shopping at the National Prison Products Exhibition.

In short, the Course was designed to provide participants with an intensive one-month’s training, full of special lectures and visits to virtually all the relevant organizations, which would be useful for beginners and professionals alike.

My only regret is that we were unable to invite as many overseas experts as we had originally planned. It would have been wonderful if we could have provided the participants an opportunity to learn from such experts about the most recent

programmes designed to reduce relapse and recidivism, such as those focusing on cognitive behavioural oriented interventions.

In the first weekend of the Course, participants and UNAFEI members visited Senso-ji, a time-honoured Buddhist temple in Tokyo. There, one fellow professor suggested that I draw a fortune slip to predict the fate of the Course, either good luck or bad luck. Not having enough courage at that time, I declined. Now, I would like to leave it to the participants to evaluate the Course.

The Closing Ceremony was attended by a number of representatives from the Embassies, and each of the proudly smiling participants received his or her certificate from the Director of UNAFEI: the 148th International Training Course was successfully concluded. All is well that ends well, just as the proverb goes. I would like to thank all the people and organizations that assisted us in implementing the Course, and the UNODC Regional Centre for East Asia and the Pacific for sending us a visiting expert.

Thank you.