

DEVELOPING ASIA JOURNALISM AWARDS (DAJA) CEREMONY: 7 APRIL 2004

PRESIDING JUDGE'S REPORT ON THE DAJA PROGRAM

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Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

Let me say right at the outset that we three judges -- Suvendrini Kakuchi, Yoshio Murakami and myself -- were each very impressed by the overall **high standard of entries** for this, the first of the ADBI "Developing Asia Journalism Awards." There were more than 250 individual stories submitted by a total of 89 entrants from most of the ADB member countries. More than a half of these were women and the average age of the entrants was between 30 and 35 years. That in itself was impressive.

We were all the more impressed, I think, because the competition was launched at relatively short notice and, quite honestly, we were not sure how many entries we could expect -- or what the standard of those entries would be.

Nor did we know how well the journalists' submissions would fit into the categories set for the awards on this occasion.

So, we kept an open mind and looked for examples of good investigate reporting and analysis that would cast new light on aspects of economic and social development. We looked for what I would call "substance" rather than polished writing -- although much of the writing was in fact of high quality -- and, of course, we did not penalize anyone whose English came out less than perfect in **translation**.

There was a strong degree of consensus among the judges when it came to the final choice of award winners and we decided in several cases to make what we called "**honorable mentions**" of certain entrants' work, where the standard of entries was very close.

Our only regret is that journalists from the **Pacific Islands were under-represented** -- and so there is no award in that category this year.

Overview of the Quality of the Submissions

Now I'd like to say a little more about the quality of the work submitted -- by journalists from right across the Asia region -- and then I'd like to offer a few ideas as to how journalists might wish to shape their entries for future awards.

Two of the categories in which submissions impressed us most were those of "Inclusive Social Development" and "Pro-poor Sustainable Growth." Some of the entries in these groups brought home in a dramatic way the terrible problems of grinding poverty, disease, lack of even primitive sanitation, inadequate schooling facilities and other problems that confront poor people in many parts of developing Asia.

I think this competition has reminded us that good journalism can make people aware of the human dimensions of development in a way that official reports can never hope to do.

Development issues are often cloaked in official jargon, so that they become unrecognizable as issues involving people. But good journalism can restore the human dimension and make us see these problems not in terms of cold statistics but of people

and their sufferings.

As my fellow judge **Yoshio Murakami** says " We were encouraged after reading at first-hand our fellow journalists' work. As long as such people -- the journalists -- are there," he said, "the condition of Asian developing countries will surely continue to improve."

I want to mention a few examples of the excellent and quite literally "**down to earth**" **reporting** that many entries contained. Most of us -- certainly those of us living here in Tokyo -- take for granted good toilet facilities. It perhaps never occurs to us that there are places in Asia where poor people have to queue every day for long periods in order to use a solitary village toilet, or where women need to use the most primitive of outdoor toilet facilities before sunrise in the morning or after dark at night so that they can retain even a minimal degree of privacy.

We who are used to having modern and comfortable schoolrooms perhaps never realize that there are children in parts of rural China and perhaps elsewhere who receive their lessons whilst standing all day on their feet in drafty and primitive schoolrooms -- for want of desks and chairs or proper premises.

The problem of **HIV-AIDS** is by no means unique to the developing world but the sufferings that victims of this disease endure where there is also poverty and deprivation are all the more terrible.

Discrimination against women, against ethnic groups and against social outcasts are again not confined to the developing world. But this kind of victimization is all the more hard to endure when it is combined with severe poverty.

Then there is the problem of **environmental degradation** in developing nations of Asia and elsewhere. As our entrants reminded us -- pollution and environmental degradation can destroy people's health and also their livelihoods. The poor have little recourse to the legal and other safeguards that exist in advanced nations.

The pillaging of forests, the destruction of water resources and other kinds of environmental vandalism are so much harder to check where the wealthy are powerful and where government is weak or corrupt, or both.

So much for the problems that our journalists brought to our attention. But what of the more **positive side of development**.

Here too, many of the articles submitted provided very good reading. There were inspiring accounts of people -- ordinary, and often poor, people -- fighting courageously against the problems of poverty and deprivation.

There was, for example, the case of a woman in China who began, single-handed, a scheme to collect small sums of money regularly from other village people, in order to provide **seed capital for starting simple enterprise**. This has helped to lift them out of their situation of absolute poverty and hopelessness.

There were people who fought to **build roads virtually with their bare hands** so they could transport their produce to market, people who strove to convert their slum dwellings into something that allowed them to attain at least a minimum degree of

comfort and self-respect. And there were people who were brave enough to **stand up to corrupt officials**, and those who sought to destroy their environment in pursuit of financial gain.

Many of the journalists were brave too. They risked the wrath of politicians, officials and wealthy power barons in seeking to "tell it like it is." I want to congratulate them and I also want to congratulate the ADBI -- Peter McCawley in particular -- for having the imagination and also the courage to promote an awards scheme of this kind.

This initiative reminds Asian journalists that they are not alone in their struggle, and it offers them recognition and prestige in front of their peers while giving them a strong incentive to continue their investigative mission.

Having said all this, I would now like to quote again from comments offered to me by my fellow judge, Murakami -san. "Digging out the real story is essential," he said, "but good investigative journalism demands that journalists should always try to get both sides of the story. This is essential for balance and it also helps to ensure that those who would like to stifle the press cannot claim that reporting is biased or 'one-sided'."

Many entrants for the awards scheme did try to achieve this kind of **fair and balanced reporting** but we judges would like to see a little more effort made in this direction in future competitions.

Now I would like to add a few concluding observations.

Concluding Observations

Although many of the entries submitted in this first contest were excellent essays on social, environmental and other problems, it would be good, I think, if in the future entrants could try to view their subject in a broader overall context of development.

What I mean by this is that while preserving the excellent standard of on-the-ground reporting of problems, journalists should try to examine what efforts -- if any -- are being made by governments, multilateral institutions (such as the ADB or the World Bank) and by bilateral aid donors or non-governmental organizations to solve these problems. The awards scheme is about **approaches to development** -- rather than simply problems of poverty and under-development in themselves.

Critiques of this kind could help the development community to better understand its own strengths and weaknesses and its successes and failures in a way that no amount of official monitoring or surveillance can do.

I personally would also like to see more reporting on a subject which is of critical importance in developing Asia and elsewhere and that is the **agricultural sector**. How are development policies and trade liberalization impacting agricultural communities, and does the rural voice need to be heard more strongly on such issues? How is the decline of agriculture in many countries being managed? How is it impacting the environment and what are the human dimensions of landless people drifting to urban centers?

What about the record of the development community in providing **basic infrastructure** such as power generation facilities, roads, railways, water, sanitation etc. and how do

ordinary people feel about this? Do they feel that such services are properly priced or over-priced? Do they feel that rural roads come a poor second to prestigious super-highways in government planning? How could the provision of infrastructure services be better managed, and do governments cooperate enough across borders in this respect? These are just a few suggestions for the future.

Now I want to close by quoting my other fellow judge, **Suwendrini Kakuchi**. "Overall", she said, " the entries represented very high standards of journalism. Choosing winners," she added, "was quite hard." Murakami-san agreed. "There are so many excellent women journalists coming up in Asia," he said, and "it was a very competitive race."

It was also very difficult for us to choose the winner of the "**Young Development Journalist of the Year**" award because again there were many good entries, but this is very encouraging because young journalists represent the future. I can only agree with both of my colleagues.

Last but not least, we should take off our hats to the ADBI for not attempting to stifle criticism of the Asian Development Bank itself, and of its policies. One of the entrants was in fact highly critical of a certain ADB-supported irrigation project in Thailand. But I can assure you there was no pressure to dissuade us from considering this submission for an award.

I had better not say any more about that particular entry until the awards are formally announced!

So, let me say thank you to you all -- to the winners and also to those who were not so lucky this time. Keep trying please.