

DAJA Awards 2006. Remarks by Presiding Judge Anthony Rowley

Good evening, I'd like to say on behalf of my myself and my fellow judges -- Ms Suvendri Kakuchi and Yoshio Murakami -- how pleased we are to be here this evening.

This is the first time that the DAJA awards ceremony has been held outside of Tokyo.

This is the third year of the DAJA program and already it's becoming something of a tradition -- an institution, one might say.

I think this is obvious from the record number of entries this year for the competition - - some 93 journalists. Entered and they submitted a total of 250 articles.

There was also a record number of female journalists entering this year and a high number of young journalists, which we judges -- being all journalists ourselves -- regard as very encouraging.

The very wide spectrum of countries from which the entries came is also a testament to the popularity of the DAJA scheme -- among journalists from right across the Asia region.

Not only the giant land masses of China and India were represented but also relatively small, land-locked countries such as Nepal put in a strong showing in terms of number of entries. The Pacific islands were better represented too this year.

Since this is the first time that this award ceremony is being held outside of Tokyo, I would like to briefly reiterate a few of the points that I made during the first ceremony three years ago about why we, as journalists, feel that this competition is so valuable to our profession.

First, it recognizes journalistic excellence in a region where there are no Pulitzer Prizes to honor such achievements, and where journalistic effort often goes unrecognized and unrewarded.

Secondly, the DAJA scheme encourages journalists to raise their sights beyond simple business journalism and to look at critical issues of development, which go beyond economics and extend into the world of social and political development.

And, thirdly, by offering these awards, the Asian Development Bank Institute and the ADB have offered journalists in Asia not just financial support but also moral support in uncovering problems of poverty, corruption and abuse which authorities often would prefer to keep covered up.

If I may repeat words that I used during last year's DAJA ceremony, and which have equal validity this year:

The DAJA entrants have shone a light for us into the dark places where grinding poverty and crippling disease still lurk in so many parts of Asia.

They have shown us a side of life, where exploitation, corruption and crime still cripple the lives of so many of the region's poor.

And, they have reminded us that however much the development community is doing to reduce poverty and to relieve suffering, there is still a very long road to travel in this direction.

As my colleague Murakami san, who is from Japan, noted, "I learned a great deal about Asia myself by reading the work of the DAJA entrants."

And, as my other fellow judge Ms Kakuchi, from Sri Lanka, commented: "I learned a great deal from the DAJA entrants about the capacity of local people and their skills and courage in dealing with development problems."

In short, we judges were once again very impressed with the overall standard of work submitted. We were particularly encouraged to see that not only the quantity but also the quality of entries for these awards is rising from year to year.

We do, however, have one or two critical observations to make.

Murakami san would like to suggest that journalists -- as he puts it "should not simply rely upon official statistics from government or international organizations to support their stories. They should "look behind these statistics, to see whether or not they accurately reflect the reality of the situation."

Suvendri Kakuchi would like you, the journalists, to broaden your sources somewhat and go beyond government officials and NGOs to find more grass-roots sources when reporting your stories. In other words, make sure that you have a balance of views from all those involved in the situation that you are describing.

For myself, I would say, try to remember that this competition is essentially about "development" and whenever you write about poverty, corruption, disease or other problems make sure that you say what is being done to address these problems. By all means be critical but try to put problems into the context of the progress that is being made, if any, toward solving them.

Finally, I would like to suggest some ways in which the scope of the DAJA competition might be widened, perhaps by tweaking the categories of entry.

Poverty alleviation remains the overarching objective of the ADB's efforts and poverty in all its manifestations should remain the main focus of this competition.

But poverty issues can be addressed in very many different ways and the DAJA journalists might wish to widen their horizons a little in this regard.

For example, they might wish to look at infrastructure issues in their countries.

Are authorities providing the kind of physical infrastructure facilities that are most needed -- and are they doing it in a way that best suits the needs of the people?

We read many official reports on this subject and we read the views of NGOs. But I seldom see journalists interesting themselves in this vital area of development policy.

Regional economic integration is also a huge and fascinating subject in which I think journalists might interest themselves more.

They could look at how economic integration in trade, investment and finance is affecting the lives of ordinary people, and whether official policies are enlightened or misguided in this area.

Well, that's enough from me -- more than enough, probably. So let's get to the exciting part of the evening which is the actual presentation of the DAJA awards.

We judges would like to offer our sincerest congratulations to all of the winners here tonight and also to the many entrants who came close to winning. Please enter again and better luck next time. Thank you.