

### UNESCO Bioethics conference held in Israel

I revisited Israel in September to attend the Bioethics conference hosted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) at the invitation of Dr. Yoram Blachar, past-President of the World Medical Association (WMA) and past-President of the Israel Medical Association. The conference was held at the Kinar Hotel, which is on the Sea of Galilee and close the Golan Heights.

Many international experts who are interested in bioethics and medical ethics participated in the conference. In recent years, medical fields which are interlinked with the broad biological field—such as gene technology, biobanks and iPS cells—have been expanding progressively. As these advances are occurring so fast, it seems necessary to establish new ethical standards through international discussion between various related authorities and stakeholders as well as the achievement of public consensus. In addition, I believe that these current developments should be incorporated into the ongoing revisions of the WMA Declaration of Helsinki.

During my stay in Israel, members of the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) who had been deployed as a supporting team for the UN PKO at the Golan Heights buffer zone visited our hotel. When the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami and the nuclear power plant disaster occurred on March 11, 2011, the JSDF provided us with support for dispatching more than 1,800 Japan Medical Association Teams (JMAT) to the disaster zone. Therefore, when I received an invitation from Mr. Mamoru Nanjo, the commanding officer of the JSDF team, I decided to visit them the next day. I sincerely wish them a safe return home to Japan after devoting themselves to this important mission.

On the way back to the hotel, I looked up at Mt. Hermon, which is 2,814 m in height. This is where the Transfiguration of Jesus is said to have occurred. I was also able to see the so-called Jesus Boat, which was found on the seashore of Galilee and is believed to be 2,000 years old, in a museum close to the hotel.

During the conference, I joined to discussions for the possibility of cooperation between the WMA and UNESCO in the fields of medicine and bioethics with Prof. Jose Luiz Gomes do Amaral, President of the WMA, and Prof. Amnon Carmi,

director of the conference, under the coordination of Dr. Blachar.

Furthermore, I was fortunate to have Prof. Shaul Michal of Tel Aviv University, a Harvard School of Public Health Takemi Fellowship alumni, introduce me to Dr. Meir Zadok, the director of the Israel Academy Sciences and Humanities in Jerusalem. In front of the seated figure of Albert Einstein on the patio of the house, we had fruitful discussions about the peaceful usage of nuclear power.

Although Japanese people have suffered due to the atomic bombings in World War II as well as the nuclear power plant accident that occurred following the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami in March 2011, nuclear energy was Einstein's greatest gift to humankind from the scientific field in the 20th century.

In late August, I gave a lecture reporting JMA activities following the 2011 disaster at the 20th International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) conference held in Hiroshima. I said in my lecture that, as we physicians are using nuclear energy in clinical settings as a tool for the health of the people, I believe that we assume an obligation to watch trends and speak out for the peaceful utilization of nuclear power with minimal risks and maximum merits for the well-being of people throughout the world.

On this occasion, I was also able to visit the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. This visit was not just sightseeing by a Japanese physician but also contained special meaning for me as I remembered the lines I spoke in a Christmas nativity play by the Spanish-run Christian kindergarten I attended in Japan some 55 years ago. As one of the three wise men in the play, I was appointed to say the line "Let us follow the Star to Bethlehem, where our Jesus was born." I was deeply moved by this special visit after spending long periods of time in its realization.

I bought a small wooden figure of a sheep made from an olive tree as I felt like a stray sheep in the changing world in this particular period of my life. Now the sheep looks at me from its perch near the JS Bach musical scores sitting on a piano in my house.

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