



# International Volunteering by Students -Experience of Bunkyo University-

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*bell is not a bell until you ring it.*

*A song is not a song until you sing it.*

*Love in your heart is not put there to stay.*

*Love is not love until you give it away.*

-Oscar Hammerstein <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> “Volunteering – 101 Ways You Can Improve the World and Your Life”, Douglas M. Lawson, Ph.D., ALTI Publishing, 1998.  
Oscar Hammerstein is renowned for his lyrics in many musicals including “The Sound of Music” and “The South Pacific.”

### 1. Which Safer, Kosovo or New York?

Flushed with terror and tension, Naoko Nakazawa, a female junior student of Bunkyo University, ran up to me and managed to utter as she gasped: “Mr. Nakamura, you know what’s happened in New York? A lot of airliners have been hijacked, all over America. America is in a panic now.” Another female student, Akiko Kawa, also rushed back and elaborated: “Professor, I called my mom and said, ‘Mom, I’ve just arrived at Vienna from Kosovo. I’m glad to tell you everything’s OK.’ Then, Mom yelled. ‘You are OK? Good! Now, New York, New York is horrible. The World Trade Center was knocked down by terrorists. Go and watch TV, and you will know.’”

Thus, the Bunkyo University students’ first successful venture of international volunteering in Kosovo in 2001 was remembered, shadowed by the history’s worst terrorist attack on the U.S. On the afternoon of September 11, 2001, ten students and I just flew back to Vienna International Airport from Kosovo, where they had been engaged in contentious volunteering. Contentious, because Kosovo had just emerged from a decade-long ethnic conflict, and seemed to be the least safe place for Bunkyo students to visit for volunteering. The students’ families and university administration were anxious about the students’ safety in Kosovo. So as soon as the students collected their baggage in the Vienna Airport arrival lobby, they ran to international phones to tell their parents in Japan that they had wound up their volunteering in Kosovo in peace and success. They expected their family’s warm congratulatory words. But the New York catastrophe had robbed their families entirely of their concern for their children’s bon voyage.

To observe, and join in if possible, the international community’s efforts to ease the scars of the ethnic and humanitarian disasters in Kosovo, the Bunkyo University students visited the Balkan province yet to be independent of Serbia and under the administration of the United Nations, for ten days in early September. It was the first ever overseas volunteering program launched by Bunkyo. In Kosovo hundreds of thousands of ethnic Albanians fled their homeland as refugees in late 1990s as the Serbian Government intensified its oppression. The conflict culminated in NATO’s air bombings in 1999. The scene of nightly NATO bombing on TV was still vivid in the minds of the students and their relatives as well as the faculty and university administration officials in 2001.

During the planning stage of the students’ volunteerism in Kosovo in the spring of 2001, the higher echelon of the university administration voiced their overt concern about the students’ safety in such a hot spot of ethnic and internal turmoil. They understood the significance of the students’ experience in international volunteerism, along with the firsthand observation of the international efforts for peacebuilding under the auspices of the United Nations. But Kosovo seemed to be “too dangerous” for the students.

To me, however, Kosovo seemed different. I was there from mid-1999 through the end of 2000 as an official of the United Nations peacebuilding mission. I observed that a lot of UN officials and NGO representatives mobilized from around the world devoted themselves to peacebuilding in Kosovo. I was confident that security was maintained in major parts of Kosovo under the vigilance of international peacekeepers - NATO forces and UN Police that numbered near 50,000 in total. A

vital scene of international cooperation was there. Everyone, either local or international, was engaged in rehabilitation of the community life and restoration of peace. No other place looked more fitting than Kosovo for university students to learn vibrant international cooperation and UN works.

In early 2001 I quit the UN service to join Bunkyo University in April to lecture on International Cooperation and the works of the United Nations. When the spring semester, the first of my academic career, began, I revealed to my students the idea of volunteerism in Kosovo. I told them there were many people in Kosovo awaiting help from the world. Many students were excited at the idea. They had watched on TV repeatedly the work of the UN, EU or NGO and wished to be part of the international community in any manner for the sake of the suffering Kosovans, or ethnic Albanians. They thought that the experience could bring a breakthrough in their inert college life.

Things were not easy, however. Then Kosovo had been posted in Category III in the travel safety criteria set by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. The category meant that travelers were advised not to visit. However confident I was of the safety and security in Kosovo under the protection of NATO and the United Nations, Kosovo was nonetheless “a dangerous place” unlike New York, a world center of business and tourism. Nobody would have been opposed to your plan of visit to New York any time, any season.

This is why I started this narration with the episode at the Vienna airport on September 11, 2001. Today no matter where you may be in the

world, you know that your safety is not guaranteed. You need to make all efforts to avoid risks, but you also need courage to face an unpredictable risk that might submerge in a lofty cause. It is the case for volunteerism by young people. Students can learn a lot through international volunteerism, the experience of which will help them steer their life and career in many years to come. Once a young person learns of the joy and meaning of helping others, his/her view of the world will change: “I am not only for myself<sup>3</sup>.”

## **2. Why International Volunteerism at Bunkyo?**

Nothing is more convincing than observing firsthand. To see is to believe. It is particularly so in the case of learning the real meaning of international cooperation. Take Japan’s participation in the United Nations peacekeeping operations (PKO), for example.

In mid-1980s when I joined the United Nations, leaving my earlier career in journalism, no leading Japanese media seriously discussed about Japan’s craved participation in the UN peacekeeping operations. Japan proclaims in the preamble of its Constitution that “we desire to occupy an honored place in an international society striving for the preservation of peace” and that “we recognize that all peoples of the world have the right to live in peace, free from fear and want.” But Japan was wary of participating in the international effort known as the UN peacekeeping operations for the reason that the Constitution stipulates in Article 9 that “the Japanese people forever renounce war as

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<sup>3</sup> A variation of the phrase is originated in the Talmudic sayings.

a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.” Answering the call of the international community for Japan’s more active role in “the maintenance of international peace and security,”<sup>4</sup> officials of the Foreign Ministry were contemplating covertly Japan’s participation in the UN-PKO for “an honored place in an international society striving for the preservation of peace.”<sup>5</sup> But they did not dare to provoke the public that fully supported the spirit of the Constitution renouncing “the use of force as means of settling international disputes.” In 1980s the leading media’s view was almost consistent with the public sentiment that the Japanese Self-Defense Forces should never be deployed overseas, even for the UN operations.

In fact the UN peacekeeping operations also renounce the use of military power. The Charter of the United Nations<sup>6</sup> emphasizes to settle international disputes “by peaceful means.” The soldiers mobilized in PKO, dubbed by the UN as “soldiers for peace,” may use small arms only for self-defense to escape a life-threatening emergency. The basic philosophy of PKO is thus consistent with the spirit of the Japanese Constitution. Japan was a whiz-kid of the international community in

economic and development cooperation, but a far cry from that “in the preservation of peace.”

As a Japanese staff member of the United Nations I assumed it one of my self-assigned missions to pave the way for Japan to participate in the UN peacekeeping operations. Paying the second largest assessment (annual obligatory fee paid by a UN member state) to the UN, only next to the United States, Japan was not a permanent member of the UN Security Council nor a prominent state in contribution to the “international peace and security,” the essential role of the UN.

Towards the late 1980s, I organized two so-called “news missions” to the UN peacekeeping operation sites, participated in by eminent Japanese journalists representing major news organizations. One was a visit to the Middle East to observe the operations<sup>7</sup> in Cyprus (UNFICYP), South Lebanon (UNIFIL), Syria (UNDOF) and Israel (UNTSO) – in 1988 and the other a 1989 visit to Namibia<sup>8</sup> which was on the eve of independence from South Africa. On return from the observation tour the journalists actively discussed in editorials and articles about Japan’s anticipated participation in the UN peacekeeping. To see was to believe for them. PKO was not inconsistent with the Japanese

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<sup>4</sup> The UN charter defines that the foremost objective of the UN is “to maintain international peace and security” while one of the three major pillars of Japan’s foreign policy is to render all possible cooperation with the UN.

<sup>5</sup> Preamble of the Japanese Constitution

<sup>6</sup> Unlike the Japanese Constitution, the UN Charter recognizes the necessity of enforcement of peace by military power (Article 42) but it is the last resort after all peaceful means have failed to deter the threats to peace. Nowhere in the Charter is defined the UN function of the peacekeeping operations, so it is construed as written between Chapter VI (Pacific Settlement of Disputes) and Chapter VII (Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace and Acts of Aggression).

<sup>7</sup> Deployed in Middle East were several long-standing UN peacekeeping operations. They included the Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO, since 1948, Jerusalem), UN Force in Cyprus (UFICYP, since 1964), UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF, since 1974, the Golan Heights, Syria), and UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL, since 1978).

<sup>8</sup> The UN deployed the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) in Namibia in 1989. Under the UN supervision Namibians held a democratic election to be fully independent of South Africa. Overseeing the operation was Mr. Martti Ahtisaari, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General and ex-president of Finland. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2008 for his distinguished contribution to peacemaking in Namibia, Kosovo and Indonesia (Aceh).

Constitution. The development thereafter was amazing. In 1992 a law to cooperate with the UN in its peacekeeping operations was enacted and by the law the Japanese Self-Defense Forces were dispatched for the first time in its history to the UN peacekeeping operations in Cambodia later in the year.

University students were no exceptions in that they learn a lot on the ground. In early 1980s there were hundreds of thousands of Cambodian refugees in Thailand who fled the internal conflicts of Cambodia. A Tokyo Sophia University student visited a refugee camp in Thailand and witnessed that there were many people who were awaiting help. He confided me later that the experience in Thailand made him decide to join the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). A good number of Japanese UN officers in the vanguard of international cooperation today have more or less similar experiences. To see international cooperation on the ground when young led them to believe in the cause of the UN and to be a staff member of the international organization.

Thus, I had harbored an idea that younger generations of Japan could find their way to international organizations once they had an opportunity to kindle their dormant passion and ambition.

The Faculty of International Studies, Bunkyo University, was an ideal place for me to inspire students to open their mind to the world. They should know that there are many people in the world who are waiting for their help. I told them that “in college you should learn that you are not only for yourself, but that you can help those who are away but awaiting your help.”

This is how and why the international volun-

teering program was launched at Bunkyo.

### **3. Basics for Successful Student Volunteerism**

Since the first volunteering in 2001, the Bunkyo volunteers have worked in Kosovo almost every year, Timor-Leste (known as East Timor before independence of 2002) for several consecutive years, Uzbekistan, China, Uganda, Bolivia and a few other countries. These volunteer programs have been organized under the aegis of the Faculty's International Volunteerism Committee that was inaugurated in 2002, one year after the first Kosovo venture. The committee is responsible for all stages from the planning to the conclusion - prior consultations with the local reliable organizations of the destination, selection of participant students, consolidation of the itinerary, briefing on the destination and activities, including that for the participants' security-concerned families, compilation of an annual report, etc.

My colleagues, Prof. Yuko Ikuta of the Faculty of the International Studies has served in the committee to oversee the whole aspects of the program each year. She has contributed a separate article to this journal, chronicling the activities year by year. Also contributing an article is Ms. Mayumi Watabe, lecturer at Bunkyo's Graduate School of International Cooperation Studies. She appraises the activities of Bunkyo students in Kosovo and the role of an NGO to lead and help volunteers on the ground. Ms. Watabe was the host to the Bunkyo volunteers in Kosovo during the most critical period from 2001 through 2002 as the Kosovo manager of ADRA Japan, a prominent Japanese NGO for international relief works and the Japan chapter of the international Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA International) based in Maryland,

USA. These two contributions will provide more precise picture of the Bunkyo volunteerism.

Accordingly, I will discuss here several essentials for a successful university student volunteerism.

**(1) Preparation:**

The most critical element to determine the success of a university volunteering program is, needless to say, that participating students can return home without troubles. As discussed earlier, no matter where people may go today, perfect security is rarely guaranteed. Should a serious, if not fatal, accident or incident involving a volunteer student occur the volunteering program would be forced to be suspended and go a hard and long way to be revived. Ironically, the destination for which volunteers are bound is apparently less safe and less comfortable — in sanitation, food, water, transportation, medical care, communication, accommodation, culture, etc. Therefore, to be well prepared for local conditions, and contingencies, are critically important in overseas volunteering. In general the needed information is not obtainable easily as the destination of volunteering is not a popular tourism spot whose information is abundant. So you need to cultivate and develop a reliable local contact(s) that can provide information, and such assistance you need as recruiting a competent interpreter or a tough and warm-

hearted driver of a rent-a-car.

**(2) Association with NGOs:**

Among others, a friendly local or international NGO is very helpful as a local contact. An international NGO representative, for example, may have been there for months or even years just as Ms. Mayumi Watabe of ADRA Japan in Kosovo. In most cases he/she can provide precise advice regarding what to be brought along to help local people, what to be considered for volunteering activities, what to be researched beforehand, etc. NGO representatives are very kind because they highly value the interest of people from their home country and others as well, particularly younger generations, in their work under way. They hope that people understand more about their work and disseminate information on their work back home. The visiting volunteers with good knowledge of the NGO work may become strong supporters of the organization or even future colleagues in the case of university students. The Bunkyo programs in Kosovo, Timor-Leste, Uganda, Bolivia, China and others were made possible because NGO representatives in Japan<sup>9</sup> and in the destinations provided extensive cooperation to the Bunkyo team. Without their warm support student volunteering at a place like Kosovo or Timor-Leste was not possible. In security-wise reliable NGO representatives on the ground are excellent shepherds. They lead

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<sup>9</sup> The Bunkyo volunteering team owes a lot to a number of prominent international NGOs for their warm assistance and cooperation in Japan and the field as well. Bunkyo’s acknowledgement should go to all of them and a special mention to, among others, ADRA Japan, OISCA International, SHARE (Services for the Health in Asian & African Regions), Food for the Hungry. In Kosovo the Kosovo Human Rights Center made an unmeasured contribution to the successful volunteering by the Bunkyo team.

and advise lest volunteers may be confronted with risks and dangers. Your mission becomes much easier if you follow the shepherds.

### **(3) Risk Management:**

Yet, you may face a risk or encounter a security problem. Even in the case close ties with NGOs and other local contacts will help make the trouble less serious. The Bunkyo team always ensured close and constant relationship with NGOs and Japanese embassies as well as local governments. Fortunately no serious problem was incurred in the Bunkyo program. This is partly because serious efforts have been made to avoid any foreseeable risk, however minor it may look. A program manager like an escorting professor must stand stern. For instance, a Bunkyo volunteer suddenly complained of high fever and stomachache at the Tokyo International Airport at Narita in 2009. The departure was just minutes away. The airport clinic could not determine the ailment. So the escorting professor instructed the student to give up the flight and go home. It was a very painful decision at the eleventh hour for the caretaker as well as the student. The student had been a leader in preparation for weeks. A long transpacific flight, however, may make the situation worse. Depending on her condition the team may be forced to cancel the volunteer mission in its entirety upon arrival at the destination. In volunteerism, participants have to share an uncompromised principle that they are traveling in order to help people but not to be taken care of. In security-wise, I have already noted the importance of good knowledge of the destination

where the student volunteering is being launched.

## **4. Rewards of Volunteerism**

Student volunteerism is the manifest of goodwill, which is reciprocated in various ways.

### **(1) Joy of Mission Accomplished:**

In the case of student volunteerism, the mission objective must be simple and clear. Unlike international organizations or NGOs, student volunteers cannot be engaged in a long term project over months. Therefore, the focus should be put on simple works – donation of daily necessities to needy people, playing with village kids devoid of pastime, listening to elderly people to help them ease anguish in memory and the like. The Bunkyo team usually bring along stationaries collected on the campus for school kids, donate a small fund raised in streets to a local NGO caring for elderly people or engage in cultural exchanges with high school or university students who are short of contact with the outside world. This sort of small but goodwill contribution wins warm thank you words in return. The local people express appreciation to the Japanese students who have traveled a long way to see them. It is the moment when the young volunteers find their mission accomplished. Bunkyo students occasionally participate in overseas projects organized by Japanese NGOs, too. NGOs usually carry out projects whose result is visible — erecting temporary classrooms, installing toilets at a village school, or distributing daily necessities. Joining in the projects, the students can witness the day-to-day progress of

their arduous labors. It also gives the volunteers a joy of the mission being accomplished.

**(2) Enhancement of International Ties:**

Another reward of volunteerism is that participating students can foster and develop firm ties with local and international people through volunteerism. Volunteerism is neither sight-seeing nor migratory labor. Its merit lies in the close association with local and international people of different culture and occupations through projects or random activities. Sharing time with them night and day, the students learn about local culture, function of international organizations or joy of sharing local meals. This is what they cannot expect in classrooms. Volunteers are not only dedicated to others' sake but also entitled to unexpected and invaluable quid pro quos for their contribution.

**(3) Clue for Future Career:**

Many Bunkyo volunteers confided that participation in a volunteer program was more likely to affect their view of life. One said: “I could not think of my future career related to international works. But now I can envisage my path that has something to do with the international community. If not in the immediate future, but some day.” In order to be involved in the work of the international community they recognize the importance of mastering English and other foreign languages. A call is emphasized that more Japanese should join international organizations and international NGOs for development or peacebuilding works. International volunteerism provides the participants with a

clue for their future career in one way or another. Some of the ex-Bunkyo volunteers participated in the Junior Overseas Volunteers program sponsored by the Japan International Cooperation Agency, a Government agency, and others headed for graduate schools for advanced studies so as to be qualified for international organizations such as the UN or its family agencies.

**5. Lessons Learned:**

The over-decade experience of international volunteering by Bunkyo University earned a number of findings and lessons.

**(1) Tools of Communication:**

Needless to say, to cope with an emergency requires a series of speedy actions. The first action is to inform the local contacts of the emergency. When the Bunkyo volunteer program started, a mobile phone was not very common in use, particularly in the destinations of volunteering. Today a mobile phone is a common tool for either international or local communication. It is not expensive to acquire a local mobile phone, too. This advantage has to be fully put in force in volunteering.

**(2) Emergency Communication Network:**

If an emergency cannot be predicted, a key is how to cope with the emergency that suddenly breaks out. A speedy alert network of the concerned is imperative. Soon after the Bunkyo volunteering program was launched, the Bunkyo University administration set out on organizing the emergency information/operation network. Once an emergency takes place

in a foreign country, the information will be given to the campus telephone operator on duty around the clock and then relayed to all those concerned with the student or faculty member security immediately. Fortunately, the emergency communication network has not been switched on in a full scale so far but the network is ready to be activated whenever a team of students visit foreign countries on a school program.

**(3) Prevention of Predictable Troubles:**

Troubles in many cases are predictable, and so preventable. One of the keys is what stern and speedy decisions you can make in the case. As cited earlier there was a case in that a student was instructed to go home at the Tokyo International Airport. In another case a plan to send a team to Timor-Leste was suspended because the local political situation threatened to deteriorate, eventually having developed to unrest. In Kosovo a small team of volunteers were evacuated temporarily to the neighboring country, Macedonia, by an official car provided by the Japanese Embassy in Belgrade when massive demonstrations threatened to prevail all over Kosovo in protest against the Hague Prosecutors' decision to summon an incumbent Kosovo president to the International Court of Former Yugoslavia. A speedy decision in each case and a timely consultation with the concerned helped the Bunkyo students avoid exposure to any serious situation. A decision for safety may be compared to the safety consideration in mountaineering. Never take a risk amidst worsening weather conditions.

**(4) Prize for Volunteering:**

All efforts have to be exerted to prevent predictable problems, but this does not mean hardship should be avoided. Young people like students can earn a lot of recompense by taking on difficulties. Volunteering poses a lot of foreseeable and unforeseeable difficulties. Each participant is obliged to solve the problem in his/her own way. The difficulties include local environment, local culture, communication gap, and physical or mental hardship and many others. Bunkyo students often expressed their satisfaction with volunteering as they said: "so many people thanked me for coming" or that "many kids wore smiles as they played with us." A student said: "Now I am very different from what I was. My view of life is very different, and this is palpable." No doubt the participants recognized that their college life began to evolve on the day when they learned that they were living not only for themselves and that they could contribute to others in their own respective manner. This is the essence of volunteerism.