

Overview of Tokyo 2010

By Dr. Yong Cho

Tokyo 2010 had the special privilege of being the first of four gatherings to be held in 2010 commemorating the Edinburgh 1910 meeting. Each of these gatherings were designed to have a unique focus and delegation, the combined sum of which represented and touched virtually every church and mission tradition in the world—from Pentecostals to Roman Catholics to the Eastern Orthodox community.

The purpose and special contribution of Tokyo 2010 was to reproduce four elements of Edinburgh 1910 which made that gathering historically significant to the global mission community. Those four elements were as follows: 1) Delegates came as representatives of all the major evangelical sending agencies and nations of the world, 2) The specific focus was on the final frontiers of the Great Commission, 3) Concerted effort was made to identify and fill in the gaps of inter-mission collaboration, 4) Participating agencies continued to cooperate following the meeting on the national, regional and global level to reach the remaining “unengaged” non-Christian peoples (today’s terminology for what were called the “unoccupied fields” in 1910).

In contrast with Edinburgh 1910, and in keeping with the new realities of global mission, it was early decided that Tokyo 2010 would be held in the non-Western world, and would be organized primarily by non-Western mission leaders, networks and agencies. At the same time, the meeting was to be a global effort, meaning Western participation was welcome and encouraged, but would only represent a minority contribution. Altogether, over 1,000 delegates came from 73 countries, representing over 600 agencies with a combined 100,000 cross-cultural missionaries on the field.

As an exciting milestone for global missions, Tokyo 2010 became the first-ever global level meeting following the Edinburgh 1910 pattern that was planned, organized, led and funded primarily by the non-Western mission movement. In contrast, the Edinburgh 1910 meeting had just a handful of non-Western participants, none of which came as representatives of non-Western mission agencies, and none of which were part of the leadership team. Similarly, Edinburgh 1980 had just one non-Westerner on its executive team, although its delegation was made up of 1/3rd non-Western mission leaders—an achievement which was greatly celebrated. Interestingly, Tokyo 2010 reflected almost the reverse of the Edinburgh 1980 meeting, with around 74% of its delegation coming from the non-Western world, and a similar percentage making up its leadership team. These percentages closely resemble the proportions of missionary sending today in the early 21st century. The percentages of delegates coming from various countries and regions also closely reflected their proportional contribution to the global missionary force.

In addition to focusing on the least-reached peoples and places in the world—what was referred to as the “breadth” of the Great Commission at Tokyo 2010—the consultation also brought attention to the “depth” of the Great Commission mandate, represented by the phrase “teaching them to obey all that I have commanded.” The Tokyo Declaration

issued at the consultation underscored the importance of this dimension both at the individual level as well as at the social or national level. Under the category of transformation, the Declaration made the following affirmations:

"The new believer's worldview must be adjusted to a biblical worldview; his lifestyle changed to increasingly conform to the image of Christ; and his ethical conduct progressively marked by biblical morals. Ideally, this results in individuals applying the gospel of the kingdom to every sphere and pursuit of life—from government to economics, from education to health, and from science to creation care. As a consequence whole communities, cultures and countries benefit from the transforming power of the gospel."

The Tokyo Declaration's emphasis on the transformational dimension of the Great Commission added an element to the Edinburgh tradition that many mission leaders felt had been a glaring omission in previous gatherings. For this reason the theme and watchword for Tokyo 2010 was established as "making disciples of every people in our generation." This watchword built on the previous two watchwords of Edinburgh 1910 and Edinburgh 1980, which were "the evangelization of the world in this generation" and "a church for every people by the year 2000." The watchword of Tokyo 2010 thus took the "generation" time frame of Edinburgh 1910, and the people group emphasis of Edinburgh 1980, and added the discipling aspect of Matthew 28:19-20. In doing so, Tokyo 2010 sought to draw attention to an important progression over the last century that has led to greater depth as well as precision in defining how we measure success in fulfilling the Great Commission.

Another unique contribution of Tokyo 2010 to the Edinburgh tradition was its inclusion and elevation of the "secular peoples of Europe" as a "frontier mission" priority for the global church. One of the most moving times during the consultation followed the presentation of Stefan Gustavsson, leader of the Swedish Evangelical Alliance, who described the dismal situation of both the society and church in Europe. After his presentation, the entire consultation (most of which represented the fruit of European missionary sending in past centuries) began to intercede for this once Christian continent that is now itself in need of pioneer missionary effort—a phenomenon being referred to as "reverse mission." At the same time, many non-Western mission leaders remarked that the very trends which contributed to the decline of the church in Europe are beginning to affect their countries as well. Such a realization brought Tokyo 2010's theme of discipleship into even sharper focus, underscoring the reality that the Christian faith is just a generation away from extinction in every society.

Ongoing coordination beyond Tokyo 2010 is being facilitated by the Global Network of Mission Structures (GNMS) and the Tokyo 2010 Mission Network. The goal of the GNMS is to build an alliance of 2,000 mission sending agencies to fully engage all the world's remaining unreached peoples in the next decade and beyond. The Tokyo 2010 Mission Network will represent a broader constituency of church and mission leaders with a special focus on discipling all nations in this generation.