

Tokyo 2010:
Analysis and Reflection on the Global Mission Consultation
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Over 880 mission leaders from 67 countries met together for the Tokyo 2010 Global Mission Consultation held this May 11-14th. The gathering was sponsored by dozens of national, regional and global mission networks and associations, representing 100,000 cross-cultural missionaries. The purpose of the gathering was to celebrate the progress made in missionary efforts since Edinburgh 1910, assess what remains to be done in making disciples of all peoples, and develop plans for inter-mission cooperation to fully engage the remaining least-reached peoples in our generation.

Following the pattern of Edinburgh 1910, most of the delegates came as representatives of their mission sending structure. A good number were the CEOs or top decision makers of both large and small organizations from around the world. Beginning a process that will continue well beyond Tokyo, mission agencies were asked to make specific commitments to send church-planting teams to those people groups without any missionary work. A special listing called the Finishing the Task List was distributed at the meeting, detailing the existence of 632 unreached people groups over 50,000 in population without any long-term missionary engagement. Specific commitments were made at Tokyo 2010 to engage 171 of these in the next three years with evangelism and church-planting initiatives. Mission organizations also signed up to send out 1,244 oral Bible teams, which will translate and dub Bible stories for priority language groups where the majority of the population are primarily oral learners. Eighty-five mission agencies also volunteered to help with national surveys in their country to document those areas without access to a culturally-relevant local church.

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.

Background and Uniqueness of Tokyo 2010

Tokyo 2010 had the special privilege of being the first of four gatherings to be held this year commemorating the Edinburgh 1910 meeting. Each of these gatherings were designed to have a unique focus and delegation, the combined sum of which should well represent and touch 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).

The Tokyo meeting was first called for by the late Ralph D Winter, convener of Edinburgh 1980. Though two other global meetings were planned in 1980, one sponsored by the Lausanne movement and the other by the World Council of Churches, Winter felt it was necessary to call a meeting that would follow the Edinburgh 1910 pattern, especially with regard to its emphasis on bringing together mission agencies to focus on reaching the final frontiers. Almost the exact same scenario would be repeated thirty years later, though unlike in 1980, the organizers of all the 2010 meetings met together in advance, exhibiting a spirit of cooperation and Christian unity not seen in previous decades.

The Edinburgh 1980 meeting is famous for encouraging mission agencies to focus on the year 2000 as a milestone for seeing a missiological breakthrough—or the birth of an indigenous church with national leadership—in every people group in the world. From out of the momentum of this meeting developed what would become known as the AD2000 & Beyond Movement, which for ten years became the largest frontier mission network of evangelical agencies and denominations ever assembled. Following the wake of the AD 2000 movement, and as the centennial of Edinburgh 1910 approached, Winter called a meeting of non-Western mission leaders and challenged them to organize a global mission consultation that would follow the blueprint of Edinburgh 1910 and 1980. However, in keeping with the new realities of global mission, this third Edinburgh-type meeting 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.

The result of this challenging idea was that 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.

As envisioned, 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.

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.

Beyond Tokyo 2010

One of the visions of the Edinburgh 1980 meeting was to see an ongoing global networking structure for mission agencies that would function in a similar capacity to Edinburgh 1910’s International Missionary Council. Although the AD2000 and Beyond Movement helped to facilitate this in part, the central office was disbanded as scheduled in the year 2000. In order to fill in this gap, Ralph Winter convened a small meeting of mission leaders from around the world in the year 2005 to discuss what it would take to bring a global network into reality that would facilitate inter-mission cooperation to finish the task of reaching all the world’s remaining unreached peoples. From out of this discussion, the foundations were laid for what has become the Global Network of Mission Structures (GNMS). The first task and priority of this new network was to coordinate efforts for Tokyo 2010, and following this consultation, to help steward whatever visions and plans the Holy Spirit might generate from the gathering.

In the pattern of Edinburgh 1980, coordinating task forces and study groups at Tokyo 2010 were encouraged to think towards a specific milestone, in this case the year 2020, and to ask the question, “What’s it going to take to see a disciple-making movement among all the world’s unreached peoples in the next decade?” The media task force, for example, set a goal to form a 20/20 Vision Partnership that would facilitate the development of contextualized media resources for every least-reached people over

one million in population by the year 2020. (The significance of prioritizing these larger ethno-linguistic groups is that most of the world's smaller unreached peoples are influenced by or can access media in one or more of the languages of these so called "mega-peoples.")

Altogether, there were 18 coordinating task forces at Tokyo 2010, which focused on areas such as frontier mission training, unreached people intercession, crisis response, missiological research, next generation mobilization, technology and mission, mission associations and networks, field partnerships and cooperation, and unreached people engagement. Each task force was encouraged to develop and discuss strategy papers that would examine the scope of the need in their particular area of focus, identify what is presently being done, and propose specific recommendations to mission agencies for how they might more effectively work together to bridge existing gaps.

From out of this study process, the Global Network of Mission Structures (GNMS) has begun to prioritize specific areas for development that will require central coordination over the next five to ten years. One of those priorities is the formation of national and regional task forces that will assess the progress of missionary deployment among the least-reached peoples and develop specific strategies to engage those population segments without any church-planting initiatives. Two large international agencies volunteered at Tokyo 2010's Global Coordination Task Force to help facilitate this process in every country and region that may require it. Another priority is the establishment of special forums to bring together on an annual basis the directors of major international missions, regional and national field leaders of expatriate missions, and coordinators of national mission associations. The latter group, which met together as part of the Mission Associations and Networks Task Force, has already set plans in motion to begin coordinating annual meetings.

Finally, the planning of Tokyo 2010 revealed the general lack of global mission intelligence in multiple areas, which the GNMS will begin to address over the next several years. There is still, for example, no existing directory of African or European mission agencies, no global registry for missionary deployment among unreached peoples, and more importantly, no unified listing of the world's priority unengaged peoples and population segments. In addition to addressing these intelligence gaps, the research department of the GNMS has begun to gather existing mission data into a global directory that will include information on all the world's known mission agencies, mission training centers, mission resources, and unreached peoples. Much of this data will be made accessible to the general public on the GNMS website. A more exclusive directory of mission leaders is also being developed which will be made available only to participating mission agencies. A similar private directory of mission resource people will also be maintained by the Global Network for the purpose of identifying consultants that have expertise in various critical areas, ranging from missionary care to accounting to relief and development.

More information about these projects, Tokyo 2010 follow up, and the Global Network of Mission Structures can be accessed at www.gnms.net.