Chapter 17

DV Laws in Japan:
The Next Steps in the Journey
of a Thousand Miles

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Japanese women initiated the international recognition of domestic violence as a human rights violation. Confronted with the denial of the prevalence and harm of domestic violence, Japanese women professionals and community leaders established the Domestic Violence Action and Research Group (“DVARG”) in 1992. They conducted a nationwide survey that documented the existence of domestic violence, the physical and emotional damage suffered by women, and the failure of police, Family Court mediators and judges, and social services to provide help to the victims.

In 1993, DVARG members presented their survey report and conducted a workshop on domestic violence for the NGO forum at the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna. In response to this presentation, the Vienna Human Rights Conference recognized for the first time that domestic violence is a human rights issue. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action proclaimed that all forms of violence against women are human rights violations against which governments should act. Again in 1995, led by the DVARG members and many other Japanese women leaders, the Beijing World Conference on Women focused on violence against women as a major issue.

The UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, Rashida Manjoo, in her Report to the General Assembly, 1 August 2011, set forth the special duty of all States to use due diligence to protect women and girls from all forms of violence:

For more than 25 years, the global movement against violence against women has worked to ‘transform significantly the place of women and the status of gender based violence within the human rights discourse.

“The 1993 World Conference on Human Rights adopted the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action that recognized that ‘the human rights of women and of the girl child are an inalienable,
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