

## Special Talk

# Aiming to Be a People-Oriented Enterprise in the Community



Chairman, Yazaki Corporation  
**Yasuhiko Yazaki**



President, Action against Child Exploitation (ACE)  
**Yuka Iwatsuki**

**Social issues are not only growing more diverse and complex, but also vary from community to community. Yazaki Corporation Chairman Yasuhiko Yazaki sat down for a conversation with Yuka Iwatsuki, President of Action against Child Exploitation (ACE), a non-profit organization working primarily to eliminate child labor.\* Together, they discussed what social issues the Yazaki Group, as an enterprise doing business around the world, should focus on going forward.**

\* Child labor is defined as labor performed by children below the minimum working age defined by law (15 years as a general rule, or 18 years in the case of work likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children). Child labor is mentally, physically, socially, or morally harmful to children and interferes with their schooling. (Source: website of the ILO Office in Japan)

**Yazaki** The business activities of the Yazaki Group have long been guided by a desire to develop in step with the community in line with the Yazaki Group Corporate Policy. To pass down this way of thinking, we need people who are ready to receive it, so we have tried continually to foster people. We have particularly hoped to develop in people the idea of thinking not just about their own gain but the good of their counterparts and communities by giving them firsthand experience of diversity and different cultures while they are still young. The Yazaki Summer Camp for employees' children (see p. 39) is one initiative that embodies this approach. On the other hand, looking at the outside world, it breaks my heart to know that as of 2016, about one in 10 children around the world, or some 152 million individuals, are performing child labor. It reminds us just how lucky the children are who take part in our summer camps.

**Iwatsuki** I had plenty of schooling and all sorts of opportunities, so when I learned that there were so many people around the world for whom this was not the case, I realized how much inequality there was. I started wondering if there wasn't something we could do, and it got me thinking about child labor. ACE started initiatives in 1997 aiming to eliminate child labor, but there are still so many working children around the world.

**Yazaki** The Yazaki Group does business in more than a few so-called industrializing nations in Asia and Africa, so we certainly cannot say it's somebody else's problem. What are the factors that cause child labor to exist?

**Iwatsuki** There are so many reasons why children work. Often, of course, it is because their families are poor, but in some countries, if the parents never went to school, they may not understand what an education can mean. Local custom or the family's own way of thinking may say that girls don't need an education. These are factors that create child labor. Children themselves sometimes don't understand the significance of going to school and decide to work instead, so that's another pathway to child labor.

**Yazaki** I see. So sometimes people aren't even thinking of going to school or don't know much about school. This is a somewhat different topic, but something I noticed from summer camp and forest kindergarten\* initiatives is that if children are allowed to play and think about rules by themselves, they will manifest some really wonderful powers.

\* "Forest kindergarten" is a general term for child rearing and care during infancy and early childhood that is built around nature experiences. (Source: Forest Kindergarten Network)

**Iwatsuki** It's really important to respect children's own way of thinking, isn't it? We once invited a child to come from Ghana, where we do projects. We let them decide for themselves who would come to Japan. All of them wanted to go. They considered: Should it be someone who speaks well? Should it be a child with experience working on a cacao plantation? Ultimately, they decided according to their own standards. Children really do have the capacity to make decisions.

**Yazaki** That's a good lesson in itself. If an adult intervenes, the adult's intentions will inevitably affect the outcome. On the other hand, there are some things that adults need to teach children in order for them to enjoy healthy growth. The same applies to child labor: the way that adults get involved has a big effect on children.

**Iwatsuki** Child labor is a problem in terms of all sorts of children's rights: their right to express their own opinions, their right to receive an education, their right to be protected from dangerous and harmful labor, and the like.

**Yazaki** Child labor is an issue the Yazaki Group cannot ignore, given that we have so many employees and extensive supply chains. The Yazaki Group takes risk-lowering initiatives to prevent that kind of thing in our supply chains, but learning more background to the issue has reminded us how important those initiatives are. Would you tell me, from your perspective as a non-profit, what the Yazaki Group needs to think about to eliminate child labor and what your expectations are of enterprises?

**Iwatsuki** Human rights due diligence is increasingly becoming important. Companies are expected to protect the rights of people working not only in their company but in their supply chain. Likewise, determine in advance what risks there are in the company and their supply chain. The Yazaki Group has sites everywhere and a global supply chain for procuring components and materials from business partners around the world. So, what I hope you will do first is continue doing business that is deeply rooted in the community. Then, be aware of where risks may be lurking in your supply chains. Check for any risk of child labor and the like not only at your direct business partners but at the vendors who supply them as well.

**Yazaki** We have already begun acting in some of those ways, but I can tell from your remarks today that there are even more proactive initiatives we need to take.

**Iwatsuki** At the same time, as I've been learning about Yazaki Group initiatives, I've found that your bottom-up culture, by which I mean the way you cooperate with people in the community to think of new businesses, synergizes with your culture of caring for people. I really encourage you to keep that up. I think our initiatives at ACE also need to be deeply rooted in the community. In communities with a child labor problem, for example, it is often the case that the children themselves want to work so they can support their families economically, which means they stay away from school. We have to do more than use words to convince people how important education is; it's critical that we work together with them to find ways to make a living so they can get their lives on track.

**Yazaki** Listening to you, I realize how much your thinking has in common with the Yazaki Group's: really understand community issues and needs and then start by asking, "What can we do?" We will continue actively working to solve the social and community issue of child labor out of our desire to be deeply rooted in the community as we reach for sustained development in step with the community. Thank you for joining me today.

## Profile

**Yuka Iwatsuki, President, Action against Child Exploitation (ACE)**  
As a Sophia University student studying abroad in America, Ms. Iwatsuki passed through Mexico on her way back to Japan. Encountering begging children in Mexico, she went on to earn a master's degree in International Public Policy from the graduate school of Osaka University, where her research focused on child labor and education. She launched ACE while in school, inspired by the Global March Against Child Labour organized by Kailash Satyarthi, the 2014 Nobel Peace Laureate. At ACE, Ms. Iwatsuki makes recommendations for Japanese and global policy on causes that include the SDGs, child labor, and business and human rights.