

SOCIAL CUSTOMS

Barking mad at animal abuse

Police indifference to acts of barbaric cruelty against animals in Japan shows the need for stricter legal protection of animals, while activists say the public also needs to be taught about responsible care of pets.

By ROY K. AKAGAWA
Asahi Evening News

The horrific Kobe case of the murder of two young children has spotlighted the lack of concern in Japan for treatment of animals.

Reports that the 15-year-old murder suspect, a junior high school student arrested in late June, cut out the tongues of cats among other cruel acts against animals, prompted Elizabeth Oliver of Osaka to write a letter to the Asahi Evening News, appealing for a stricter law to protect animals against abuse.

Oliver is the director of Animal Refuge Kansai (ARK), an animal shelter in a rural part of Osaka Prefecture that is close to the borders of Kyoto and Hyogo prefectures. ARK was last in the news after the Great Hanshin Earthquake, when it found itself taking care of close to 600 animals, mostly pets that had nowhere to go when their owners were forced into temporary accommodation.

Oliver, a British citizen who has lived in Japan now for almost 30 years, voices a criticism commonly heard among animal welfare advocates in Japan about the current Law for the Protection and Control of Animals.

"The law is like a sieve because there is no definition of cruelty," she said. "It will be very difficult to

that taking action against animal cruelty might stem more violent acts against humans.

Shimizu said the group was hopeful that debate on amending the animal protection law could begin as soon as the next extraordinary session of the Diet convenes, expected later this month.

In addition to spelling out concrete examples of cruelty in a revision of the animal protection law, the Citizens Conference also advocates the licensing of animal vendors as well as stricter penalties for acts of cruelty.

Under the current provisions, the maximum penalty for an act of cruelty against an animal is only 30,000 yen. Animal welfare advocates say that the low figure dissuades police from actively seeking out perpetrators of cruelty against animals.

Tomomi Hagiwara of the Japan Anti-Vivisection Association (JAVA) cited the case in February of a cat in Toriikomai, Hokkaido that was apparently set on fire with either gasoline or kerosene. Family members found the burning cat and took it to a veterinarian, but with about 70 percent of the cat's skin burned, the animal died within a week.

Is burning a cat not a crime?

Police handled the case as an incident of damage to property since a building near the home of the

