

**The Nansen Refugee Award Winner 2006:
Dr. Akio Kanai, chairman and CEO of Fuji Optical.**

Born in 1942 on the northern Pacific island of Sakhalin, Dr. Akio Kanai was forcibly displaced and moved to Japan during the turmoil at the end of World War II. This experience would shape his perception of the difficulties and challenges facing refugees and internally displaced people.

He studied business at Waseda University in Tokyo and then crossed the Pacific in 1966 and enrolled in the Southern California College of Optometry. After graduating as a doctor of optometry in 1972, Dr. Kanai visited communities of Hopi Indians in Arizona to test their eyes and distribute spectacles. It was a formative experience and the seed for his future humanitarian work in helping to improve the quality of life for tens of thousands of refugees and displaced people with poor eyesight.

Dr. Kanai returned to Japan in 1973 to work for Fuji Optical, his family's mid-sized concern based on the northern island of Hokkaido. In 1996 he became the third president of the company and is now the chairman and chief executive officer.

He began his humanitarian optometry work in 1983 in Thailand with Indochinese refugees, many of whom had lost or broken their glasses while fleeing. Many were undergoing courses ahead of being resettled and needed glasses to study. Dr. Kanai checked the sight of the refugees and, in doing so, started a long engagement with refugee work.

He began cooperating with UNHCR in 1984, and has since conducted more than 24 missions to help uprooted people in Nepal, Thailand, Azerbaijan and Armenia. He has donated more than 108,200 pairs of glasses, provided optometry equipment, made cash grants worth almost US\$75,000 and trained local medical staff. Fuji Optical is UNHCR's longest-serving corporate partner.

Dr. Kanai's family and his staff are also involved in Fuji Optical's Vision Aid Missions. Some 70 employees have taken part in the missions, using their holidays to work in refugee camps.

"Fuji Optical, using its core business techniques, is helping to improve the lifestyle and future of refugees through the positive participation of its employees in Vision Aid Missions. This assistance demonstrates the warmth of human hands," an article in the Asahi Shimbun said in 2004. That same year, the daily newspaper awarded one of its annual Corporate Citizen Awards to Dr. Kanai and his company for their humanitarian work.