

High School Category

First Prize

Shota Hanayama

“First Step toward Resolving the North Korean Abductions Issue”

“Lest we forget.” This is the wish of the families of people abducted by North Korea.

I watched the DVD “Megumi,” which deals with the North Korean abductions of Japanese nationals. The portrayal of Shigeru and Sakie Yokota, the parents of the abductee Megumi Yokota, running energetic street campaigns to resolve the abductions issue with help from numerous people, conveyed their strong determination to bring their daughter back to Japan. At the same time, the short movie depicted the sense of concerns among victims’ families about time idly passing by without seeing a resolution to the issue.

I also read a newspaper article titled, “A Letter to Megumi.” I became overwhelmed with emotions when I read a comment by Megumi’s parents, saying “Come back to Japan so that we can have a new family portrait taken.” Megumi’s father, Shigeru, had a photograph taken with Megumi, wearing her junior high school uniform, 40 years ago. In the winter of the same year, Megumi was kidnapped by North Korean agents. The letter described the parents’ passionate desire to want to bring Megumi back to Japan and live as a family once again in Japan.

The North Korean abductions issue is Japan’s national issue. Each and every Japanese citizen must take an interest in the issue, and build up a public opinion to appeal the need for its solution to parties in and outside the nation. That is because, unless the entire population sees this issue as a priority, North Korea might underestimate Japan’s resolve to bring back all abductees in future negotiations.

Becoming interested in the abduction issue is about becoming aware of, and empathizing with, the suffering of abductees and their families. Do we afford similar awareness and empathy for people around us? If not, how can we possibly do so for these victims who live far away?

On reflection, I feel I could have made more effort to notice when my friends around me need some help, and actually offered such help.

I want to boost my level of interest in the abductions issue. To do so, I must become more interested in people around me. I am surrounded by people with various

disabilities at the special needs school I attend. I want to increase my sensitivity toward the needs of those people, e.g. what wishes they have, what kind of life they want to lead, and what types of support they need in what situations. That will lead to enhancing my interest in the abductees and their families.

I plan to talk about the abductions issue in the one-minute speech we do every day in the morning gathering. That will increase my own interest in the issue, and help others around me gain their interest at the same time.

Resolving the abductions issue requires the buildup of small initiatives like this by individual persons. I am determined to initiate whatever actions I could take, however small they may be.