

(Provisional Translation)

**Keynote Remarks by H.E. Mr. MATSUNO Hirokazu,
Minister in charge of the Abduction Issue**

I am MATSUNO Hirokazu, Minister in charge of the abduction issue. On behalf of the Government of Japan, I would like to thank Permanent Representatives of the US, Australia, the Republic of Korea and the EU for co-hosting today's symposium. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude for the participation of families of victims, not only from Japan but also from Thailand; the former president of the “Commission of Inquiry on human rights in the DPRK”; the former ambassador for North Korean human rights, the Republic of Korea; and the British ambassador to Korea who have the experience of being stationed in North Korea.

Many Japanese were abducted by North Korea during the 1970s and 1980s. In October 2002, five abductees were able to return to Japan, but it is truly regrettable that we have not been able to bring back a single abductee since then, and the Government takes this fact seriously.

With regard to North Korea, the Government of Japan seeks to normalize its relations with North Korea through comprehensively resolving outstanding issues of concern, such as the abductions, nuclear, and missile issues, and settling the unfortunate past, in accordance with the Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration of 2002. In particular, as the families of the victims continue to age, the abduction of Japanese nationals, an issue whose resolution has time constraints,

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is a human rights issue.

Only two people are still alive among the parents of the abductees recognized by the Government of Japan. Therefore, we cannot let our mindfulness dwindle for even a moment.

At the G7 Hiroshima Summit held last month, Prime Minister KISHIDA sought the continued understanding and cooperation of the leaders toward the immediate resolution of the abductions issue and once again gained their full support.

We reaffirmed that we would urge North Korea to resolve the abductions issue immediately in the Leaders' Communiqué.

In addition to making such appeals to the international community, it is crucial for Japan to act on its own initiative in order to resolve the abductions issue.

Establishing a constructive relationship between Japan and North Korea will not only serve the interests of both sides but also contribute greatly to regional peace and stability. However, the longer the current situation continues, the more difficult it will be to build a new relationship between Japan and North Korea may become even if both sides seek to do so. Now is the time to take bold action to change the present situation, without wasting even a moment.

To this end, as Prime Minister KISHIDA has announced, it is

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critical that both Japan and I make proactive efforts and build relations between leaders.

This is why Prime Minister KISHIDA has always said that he is determined to meet with Chairman Kim Jong-Un face-to-face anytime without any conditions, and he will do everything within his power in this regard.

We will continue to seize every possible opportunity to convey determination of Prime Minister KISHIDA to Chairman Kim Jong-Un from the perspective of resolving outstanding issues of concern in Japan-North Korea relations and jointly carving out a new era. At the same time, Japan will press forward proactively, engaging in high-level consultations while reporting directly to Prime Minister KISHIDA, to bring about summit-level talks at an early time.

Based on a broad perspective, Prime Minister KISHIDA will overcome every obstacle and make his own decisions for the peace and stability of the region and the international community as well as for both Japan and North Korea.

I would like to conclude my remarks in the belief that the active discussions at today's symposium will further deepen the momentum in the international community for resolving the abductions issue as a global issue, which will push North Korea into action.