



➤ Towards the Immediate Rescue of All Abductees!

North Korean Human Rights Abuses Awareness Week

Essay Competition 2020

Awarded essay

Junior High School Category 1st Prize

(tentative translation) North Korean abduction

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“Unbelievable.”

That’s what I thought. She was a junior high school student like me. She had important family and friends like I do. She was surrounded by people who cherished her like I am. A casual conversation was what she enjoyed the most. All those were broken in an instant by those whose names she didn’t even know. When I imagined it, I felt my heart tightening. At the same time, I got afraid of myself on realizing that I had never tried to understand the meaning of the posters displayed in the school and ignored them as something that had nothing to do with me.

No matter what words we use in trying to express the feelings of the parents of Ms. YOKOTA Megumi, I know words could never ever fully express them. I try to imagine what kind of feelings they carried for twenty years even without knowing that their dearest daughter had been abducted, how they felt when they finally discovered that she had been abducted. I am so mortified although I am not even her family. And the sadness her father and mother felt, I believe, is totally beyond our understanding. Mr. YOKOTA used to say that he wanted to show Megumi the new Japan of today. But he passed away without being able to do so.

We have no time to waste. The time left is limited. Then what can we do? To begin with, I wonder if there is anything that I, a junior high school student, could do. When I conducted some research, I found out that a variety of measures has been taken. But, to be honest, I came to a standstill when I realized it was hard for us to pick a certain solution and carry it out on our own.

Therefore, I came up with three ideas that I can carry out now by myself. The first is to deepen my understanding. I can search the Internet or watch TV programs to find out what happened in the past and what the situation is at present, and, thus, learn what I didn’t know. The second is to raise awareness of many people. When I watched the anime “Megumi,” I wanted many people to watch it. I actually introduced the anime to one of my friends who had little idea about the North Korean abductions issue. The friend said that he/she has been shocked and had cried.

We can also write an essay, like I am doing right now, make a report, or write in the newspaper on the abductions issue. These are the things we can do. The third is to cherish the happiness hidden in the ordinary. The happiness of being able to live with family, laugh with friends watch our favorite TV programs, and eat hot meals. There are so many. It is not easy to live keeping these ideas constantly in mind, but I want to be someone who can naturally feel grateful.

The number of people deprived of their freedom by abductions is not one or two. Their families are still struggling and fighting in despair. I have resolved that I will never forget their abductions, the act of depriving them of their freedom, which should never happen again, and I will keep doing what I can do now.

Junior High School Category 2nd Prize

(tentative translation) What we should do

TAKAYAMA Manaka

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Every day, I enjoy doing what I want to do. I thought there were only people who lived freely in Japan after the war. Then, the other day, in a social studies class at school, I learned that Ms. Yokota Megumi, a 13-year-old girl, younger than I, was indiscriminately abducted by North Korea. It caused a pain in my chest. The pain worsened when I imagined myself, or my family, being abducted. As I heard that 16 people besides Ms. YOKOTA Megumi had been abducted, I used the Internet during the summer vacation to research the abductions issue.

When I heard the phrase "abductions issue," I used to think that it must have happened a long time ago. But I learnt that it happened only 40 years ago. I felt more closer to this issue, and it scared me. Like Ms. YOKOTA Megumi, most of the victims are unable to return to their families. I wondered why North Korea would do such a terrible thing. "I was robbed of everything except my life." This is what Mr. HASUIKE Kaoru, an abductee, said about the incident. When I heard his words, I thought I would never try to seek profit by depriving others of their freedom. I could not believe that they could do such a thing as a same human being.

Meanwhile, I learned that the families of the abductees formed the "Association of Families of Victims Kidnapped by North Korea" (AFVKN). The sadness of losing a family member must have been beyond words, and the family members must have suffered so much. Even in such a situation, they regarded the incident as "something they must not forget" rather than avoiding it as an "something they do not want to remember," believing that they will reunite again. I was impressed by the strength of their belief.

I investigated what we could do to deal with this ongoing abductions issue and learned that the AFVKN members had been conducting activities gathering signatures on the streets. In Gifu prefecture, one will be held at Gifu station on January 11, 2020. The collected signatures, I heard, will be used to arouse public opinion for the return of all victims. I think this is an activity that enables us to cooperate with the abductees and their families. I would like to participate in

helping my fellow Japanese citizens. I don't think it's good that people are beginning to regard the abductions issue as something that happened long ago, like I did before hearing the story in class. The victims' families would never forget it. Therefore, we need to learn about the incident and never forget it.

The issue of abduction of Japanese citizens by North Korea is a violation of human rights and should never be tolerated. "Human rights" means "the right of all to secure life and freedom and pursue their own well-being." Abduction violates that right.

In writing this composition, I learned about the abduction, an incident that should never have occurred, and was able to find out what I would be able to do. I hope that all the victims can return to their home countries as soon as possible and they can enjoy their freedom.

Junior High School Category 2nd Prize

(tentative translation) What we should think about now

NIGORISAWA Mihane

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What do you think about the North Korean abductions issue? I strongly feel that more people should be more interested in this issue so that it does not become a thing of the past.

It was when I watched the news of Mr. YOKOTA Shigeru's death reported in June this year that I became interested in the abductions issue. I learned that the reunion with his daughter Ms. YOKOTA Megumi, who had been abducted by North Korea 42 years ago, had not happen. It has been about 18 years since the details of the abductions came to light. On learning about Shigeru, who was said to be a symbol of people seeking the return of the abductees, I was driven by a strong urge to do something.

"Have a good day," the last words they exchanged, were as casual as usual. The reality of the abductions issue packed into an anime of about 25 minutes was totally beyond my imagination. The anime "Megumi" is based on the story of Shigeru and his wife, Sakie. What I felt many times while watching the video was the pain tightening my chest.

"In addition to having my voice totally muffled, I was put in a situation where I couldn't move my body. I was pressed so hard. I was put on a ship after dark. This is the reality of the abduction," said Mr. HASUIKE Kaoru, one of the victims, in an interview explaining his situation at that time. Megumi experienced the incident when she was in the first year of the junior high school. Her age at the time of the abduction was close to mine now, which intensified the fear I felt when I imagined something like that happening to me. That fear made my whole body shudder. Megumi's daily life, which she was supposed to enjoy, collapsed in a moment.

What surprised me most was that it took about 25 years to discover the abduction. Till then, there had been no clue about her. Megumi's family just had to keep waiting for her return in such a situation. The sadness they felt, I thought, could never be understood by anyone other than her family.

It was at the Japan–North Korea summit meeting on September 17, three years before I was born, that the issue of her being reported “missing” began to be referred to as the “abduction issue.” North Korea acknowledged the abductions and apologized. In the following month, five victims returned to Japan. It should have been a ray of hope for Shigeru, who believing in his daughter’s return, kept working with all kinds of conflicts in his mind.

Until today, no major progress has been made in the abductions issue. I now feel that this incident is being forgotten. Now that the reunion of Megumi’s family has not come true, isn’t it the time to take this issue more seriously? We should be interested in what is happening “now” rather than dismissing it as an “old” story. We should tell and relay what we have learned to others. What I can do now may be really insignificant, but I have a belief: the day will come when trivial actions will become a source of optimism for the future. I strongly hope that people’s interest in the abductions issue will increase and that it will be solved soon.

High School Category 1st Prize

(tentative translation) Take a step out of a "bystander"

YAMAGUCHI Rinka

11th grade, Ehime Prefectural Imabari Kita High School

"I wasn't born to be abducted."

If I were to describe Ms. Megumi's thoughts on her behalf, I would use this sentence.

"Mother, who gently calls me Megumi-chan. Dad, who always happily takes my pictures. Naughty but cute little brothers. Every-one is my dear and irreplaceable family. I love them so much and want to see them. I'm dying to see them."

Last November, I visited Megumi's abduction site in Niigata prefecture. The place looked like an ordinary cityscape with a quiet residential area. However, I found signboards standing there to appeal for information about this abduction case, which evoked quite overwhelming feelings. As I walked on, the area, overlapping with the scene I saw in the anime "Megumi," caused a sudden heaviness in my stomach. Megumi's fate changed on this very road I had just walked on. Megumi was abducted while she was walking home from her junior high school. She left school with two friends at 6:30 pm and has not returned home to date. Neither the situation nor the suffering has changed. Time elapsed mercilessly, and the most terrible thing happened.

-Mr. YOKOTA Shigeru, Megumi's father, passed away.-

The words that appeared in the newsflash shook me in an instant. He left without being able to rewrite the memory of Megumi at the age of thirteen. His tears overlapped mine.

It is not uncommon for the abductees' family members like Mr. YOKOTA Shigeru to die before getting a chance to reunite with their loved ones. Many in Japan were unaware of this fact. Or, even if we did know, did not take action. Many people all over Japan, I assume, must have shed tears at his obituary. Nevertheless, ephemeral tears are nothing but mere sympathy. No matter how much they mean it, it remains someone else's grief. We have not questioned the world remaining unchanged

for forty-three years. We have just kept on observing it as bystanders. And now, we observe the result. The abducted side is, of course, to blame. Nonetheless, it is also the responsibility of all of us, Japanese people, to correct the situation.

There are many things that an individual can do while macrocosmically grasping the situation as a national issue. For example, you could participate in international symposiums and listen to the voices of abductee' s family from around the world. You could also post your thoughts in this way, like I am doing now. You can start with a small step. There is no limit to what you can do. In order to put an end to this issue, each and every citizen needs to be willing to collaborate with the government. Let us ask ourselves again: Are we going to silently allow this preposterous and inhumane act of "abduction" to be forgotten? The answer is absolutely "NO!" We need to make North Korea recognize and apologize for the abduction and promise never again to do such a ruthless act. A world where all can enjoy human rights as is naturally guaranteed and live life in peace should prevail. All abductees should be released and return to their hometowns as soon as possible. "We must have been born with freedom naturally endowed!"

High School Category 2nd Prize

(tentative translation) Regain freedom

MINAMI Soma

10th grade, Keiai Gakuen Senior High School

I had never pondered on the North Korean abductions issue. It was because I thought somewhere in my mind, "It has nothing to do with me." The other day, I watched the anime "Megumi" to write this composition. It made me directly face the tragic reality of the North Korean abductions issue and realize how inaccurate the perception I had earlier was. Megumi desperately screamed for help when she was forcibly carried into a tanker. Her horrified screams made me realize that this was never somebody else's problem.

On June 5, 2020, Megumi's father, Mr. YOKOTA Shigeru, passed away. He devoted the latter half of his life to the campaign for Megumi's return. The regret and disconsolation he must have felt when passing away without being reunited with Megumi is totally beyond my imagination. However, we can inherit his desire to rescue Megumi.

In order to resolve this problem, I think it is important for us, as the Japanese people, to become interested in the abductions issue and transmit our opinions. One way to get more people to know about the abductions issue is to use social media. For example, a government-led discussion on social media, I think, would be effective. When we use them, I believe that even people who would usually never go out to attend events or who are not good at interpersonal activities could easily participate and exchange all kinds of opinions with other people.

The Japanese are not the only victims of abduction. Currently, we know that victims from fourteen countries were abducted. In order to get the abductees back, we need to cooperate with these countries. I would like to propose that the abductee countries create an organization that is independent of world situations and exists for the sole purpose of rescuing the abductees. If the abductee countries continue to appeal together to the international community, I think it can put considerable pressure on North Korea.

Abduction is a serious human rights issue that robs people's freedom. We must

take this issue gravely and work toward a resolution. I have pondered on what I can do now to resolve the abductions issue. One of my answers is to use social media to increase the number of people who are interested in the abductions issue. When more people than now become aware that the abductions issue is a "problem that must be resolved," it will be a big step toward the resolution. Another answer is to wear a blue ribbon badge. When we purchase one, we are actually sending support money and expressing our intention to demand the return of the abductees.

It is the voice and action of each one of us that support the resolution of the abductions issue by North Korea. Isn't it time for each and every citizen to speak up, cooperate with other countries, and confront North Korea?

High School Category 2nd Prize

(tentative translation) We will never give up

SOMIYA Madoka

11th grade, St. Mary's Girls' High School

Do imagine. Your close family members, friends, or lover is abducted. Suddenly they are taken to an unknown country. You should never consider the abductions issue by North Korea as another person's affairs.

It was the panel exhibition I saw at the age of ten at Niigata Airport that inspired me to think about the abductions issue. The anime "Megumi" I saw there shocked me when I was very young. I still remember the horror I felt at that time. The other day, the news came in that Mr. YOKOTA Shigeru had passed away. Now, as a high school student, I pondered about what I can do.

The abductees' families have never given up and are still waiting for them to return. As the family members are aging, eight parents have died without being able to reunite with their children even after the 2002 Japan-North Korea summit meeting. In 2020, Mr. YOKOTA Shigeru and Mrs. ARIMOTO Kayoko died without reuniting with their daughters. Mrs. ARIMOTO used to say in her messages, "I want to stay healthy until Keiko returns." My heart ached at her words. The North Korean abductions issue must be resolved as soon as possible.

What we, as high school students, can do is recognizing, researching, and understanding the abductions issue. Ms. YOKOTA Megumi was abducted when she was thirteen years old. It is important for those in the same generation to recognize this fact and have a sense of ownership of the issue. Then, it will prevent the younger generations from losing interest. It is necessary to instill more the "North Korea Human Rights Abuses Awareness Week", which is held from December 10th to 16th every year. We should take advantage of this week to have our schools prepare a place to learn about the abductions issue and exchange ideas. In an attempt to enable all elementary and junior high school students to gain awareness about the abductions issue, I would like the school authorities to incorporate an even just one-hour class into the curriculum. Creating an opportunity for students to learn about the abductions issue and ponder on it will be a step toward resolving the issue.

My aunt was ten years old in 1977, when Megumi went missing. When my aunt was a high school student, there were already rumors in Niigata prefecture that Megumi was abducted by North Korea. However, it wasn't until many years later that they received an official confirmation of the abduction. In those days, my aunt used to casually talk about the rumor without any thought. She now regrets this and imagines that something might have changed if people, including her, had requested the government to investigate and public opinion had arisen at that time. It is, I believe, a duty of the young generations to disseminate the information without regarding it as the role of the government or adults. For example, social media is a good way to express our opinions. Political contents will necessarily draw not only favorable responses but also criticism. Nevertheless, the resulting controversy should help us to recognize the abductions issue and prevent it from being forgotten.

Here is what we could do. First, let each and every one of us get to know about the North Korean abductions issue. Then, let us have an opinion and transmit it, resuming our efforts, and, thus, making it grow into a great force. We shall never give up until the issue is resolved.

English Essay Category 1st Prize

Abduction is not just a matter of Japan and North Korea: It is a global issue

HIRANO Eri

11th grade, Tokyo Metropolitan Kokusai High School

North Korea's abductions of Japanese nationals have long been an outstanding issue between the two countries. According to the Japanese government, 17 Japanese citizens are identified as abduction victims. Five of them were repatriated in 2002 after then-North Korean leader Kim Jong Il admitted to the abductions. The abductees are allegedly compelled to train North Korean spies with the Japanese language, customs and culture. Abduction is a deprivation of human rights and freedom, and it reflects Pyongyang's contempt toward humanity and the international community.

Amid a lack of tangible progress of the issue, Japan lost one of the strongest advocates this year. Shigeru Yokota, the father of Megumi Yokota who was kidnapped by North Korean agents at age 13 in 1977, passed away. He and his wife, Sakie Yokota, called for the return of their loving daughter and other abductees for more than 40 years which left a significant impact in Japan and the world in terms of disseminating information about the North Korean abduction. I could never imagine the pain Mr. and Mrs. Yokota suffered for not being able to see Megumi for so long.

In the absence of diplomatic ties between Japan and North Korea, I think that reinforcing coordination with the United States, China and South Korea, countries that can influence North Korea, is vital for pushing forward the issue. Recognizing the North Korean abduction as a "global issue" and putting stronger international pressure on the country could force North Korean leader Kim Jong Un to resolve this human rights violation. As Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said in his video address to the United Nations General Assembly on September 26, we have no time to lose as the families of the victims continue to age. Prime Minister Suga also said he is ready to meet with Mr. Kim "without any conditions."

As a minor, what I can do for the abduction issue may be limited. However, I believe that delivering messages of the tragedy through this essay and discussing with my friends and other youths abroad could enhance awareness of the issue. Encouraging people to closely watch Pyongyang's development of nuclear weapons and missiles,

which pose a threat to the international community, is also important to promote understanding on what kind of a country North Korea is.

Since I spent a part of my childhood in Beijing, I have a great interest in Japan's relations with China and diplomatic issues in broader Asia. I also like South Korean entertainment culture, so I have been studying the Korean and Chinese languages in addition to English. I believe learning the Korean language is a good way to know North Korea's perspectives on the abductions of Japanese nationals, regional security, and other issues. I would like to continue such studies so I can hopefully contribute to a resolution of the abduction issue.