

Junior High School Category

First Prize

Ai Katabe

“Human Rights Issue of the Entire International Society”

At the UN General Assembly held in New York on September 19, Japanese people paid close attention to a statement made by U.S. President Donald Trump. He made strong criticism about the North Korean abduction of a Japanese girl, who was just 13 years old at the time. While North Korea’s ambassador left the chamber in protest, Japan overwhelmingly welcomed the remark, highlighting a major significance in Trump’s statement at a time of serious turmoil in international society. The case is now acknowledged as a serious case of human rights violation, but it all began some 40 years ago.

Since 1977, a number of Japanese people disappeared into thin air. After 20 years of complete disappearance, reports began to surface about the sighting of Japanese persons in North Korea. The government asked North Korea to investigate, but Pyongyang refused to admit any abduction, and did not even agree to official negotiations. It was not until 2002, when North Korea admitted having kidnapped Japanese nationals and apologized in a summit meeting with Japan. Yet, only five people were returned to Japan, and the rest of the abductees were treated as either having become deceased or having never entered North Korea. The hopes of victims’ families were dashed. Since then, many families continue to wait for the return of their loved ones in sorrow.

One of the unreturned abductees is Megumi Yokota, aged 13 at the time of abduction. She was kidnapped and taken to North Korea all alone, having had her life as an ordinary junior high school student suddenly destroyed. I could not even imagine the level of terror, desperation and sadness she has suffered.

Have you heard of a “Blue Ribbon” badge? The blue represents the color of the Sea of Japan and blue skies. The badge has been developed as part of a campaign to demand the return of all the remaining abductees. It symbolizes their families’ conviction that they are still alive and will be rescued one day. North Korea’s nuclear program and missile launch issue are drawing attention away from the abductions issue. The blue ribbon badge is appealing to us that we should never forget about those abductees who continue to suffer in North Korea.

There are activities on North Korean abductions issue in place across the nation, in addition to the Blue Ribbon campaign. Public education activities, radio broadcasts, etc. are undertaken not only by the government but also by private organizations. For junior high school students like myself, it is not easy to take part in these activities. Yet, we can take a small but significant step toward resolution of this issue. That “step” is to become more interested in the abductions issue. Some may say it is too insignificant a step to take. However, becoming interested in this issue can transform the way we behave in daily life. For example, when you hear about President Trump’s aforementioned statement, you become inspired by it and bring it up when talking with friends, rather than simply thinking, “so what?” I know that is what happens, because that is how I responded. I want as many people to become interested in the abductions issue as possible and communicate it to other people. I sincerely hope that this essay will spark an interest in this case among as many people as possible.