

(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, and the EU for co-hosting today's symposium. I would like to also express my sincere gratitude for the participation of the families of victims, not only from Japan, but also from the United States and Thailand. I also appreciate that we have the panelists who are former ambassadors to North Korea.

Many Japanese were abducted by North Korea during the 1970s and 1980s. There are 17 abductees who have been officially identified by the Government of Japan, and more than 800 people for whom the possibility of abduction cannot be ruled out. In October 2002, five abductees were able to return to Japan, but since then no abductees have been able to return.

Furthermore, the final report of the Commission of Inquiry (COI) on the Situation of Human Rights in the DPRK, published in February 2014, mentioned that, in addition to Japan, people from the Republic of Korea, Lebanon, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Romania, France, Italy, the Netherlands, and China were abducted by North Korea. Of course, the countries whose own citizens were abducted including Japan should seriously address human rights infringement of their own people. At the same time, the abductions issue caused by North Korea is a serious violation of fundamental human rights, which is a universal value of mankind. Hence, the international community needs to work together furthermore.

From this perspective, at the UN, the resolutions on the Situation of Human Rights in the DPRK have been adopted by the General Assembly 17 times for 17 consecutive years and at the Human Rights Council 15 times for 15 consecutive years, both of which called for the immediate resolution of all issues related to abductees. I believe that these initiatives are of great significance in demanding North Korea's concrete actions. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your understanding, cooperation and support from all over the world.

It goes without saying that, the Government of Japan bears the responsibility of rescuing the Japanese abductees. In addition to the abductees themselves, their families

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are also getting older. Not insignificant number of them have died, without reuniting with their loved ones. I renew my conviction that there is no time to lose. Prime Minister KISHIDA has stated his determination to face Kim Jong-Un without any conditions. For realizing the return of all abductees as soon as possible, we will continue to do our utmost efforts through mobilizing all available resources of the Government of Japan without missing any opportunities.

Prime Minister KISHIDA held a Japan-US summit meeting with President Biden last month. Prime Minister KISHIDA asked for full understanding and cooperation of the US towards the immediate resolution of the abductions issue and obtained further support from the United States. In addition, President Biden met with the families of abductees and encouraged them. I attended the meeting, and I was moved by the dialogue between the President Biden and the families. Furthermore, in the Japan-Australia-India-U.S. (Quad) Leaders' Meeting which followed the Japan-US summit meeting, and in the Japan-EU Summit which was also held last month, the leaders have also confirmed coordination on the abductions issue.

I strongly hope that active discussions at today's symposium will contribute to further strengthening of the momentum in the international community for resolving the abductions issue as a global issue. I would like to conclude my remarks with thanking for your participation in this symposium.