



North Korean Human Rights
Abuses Awareness Week

Essay Competition 2021

Awarded essay

Towards the Immediate Rescue of All Abductees!

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Junior High School Category 1st Prize

(Provisional Translation) Thinking about the abduction issue

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“If it were me...”

Fear struck my body. I watched the video about Megumi at school. If I had been taken to a country that I don't know by strangers, as Megumi had been, I would have lost the will to live. I might have just thought “I hope it's just a dream.” or “I don't want to believe it.” I would have been driven to despair and anxiety, wondering what would happen to me now that I were separated from my family. However, Megumi did not lose hope for her family in Japan, and looked forward to the future with hope. I was deeply impressed. “Everything was taken from me except my life.” These are the words of Mr. HASUIKE Kaoru, an abductee. That make me lose myself and the meaning of my life. I used to hear the word “abduction” only with a simple idea that it was terrible. However, my idea of “abduction” and the reality were very different.

As I researched the “abduction issue” little by little, I came across the key word, “unimportant.” I was surprised. I felt that there were more than a few people in Japan who were not interested in this issue. In June 2020, Mr. YOKOTA Shigeru, who had worked together with his wife, Mrs. YOKOTA Sakie with all his might, passed away. He must have been very disappointing. The only thing that saved him was that he was able to meet his granddaughter, Ms. Eun-kyung Kim, and her child in 2014. He said that the ordinary thing had finally come true. Ms. YOKOTA Sakie says, “What I want is sincerity and action, not words.”

The abduction issue is an issue between Japan and North Korea. We should not blame or discriminate against North Korean citizens. A new human rights issue will arise. I believe it is important for Japan as a whole to work to resolve this issue.

Is there anything we can do? I think the public's interest in this issue will increase if we participate in a petition or broadcast the issue on the news. I think it would be good if we could exchange various opinions without letting it fade away. Rather than fighting, I think Japan should actively move and have numerous conversations on this issue. If we do this, we will learn the facts and find a solution.

This year, the Tokyo Olympics will be held. The slogan for the Olympics is "Inspiration unites us all". I believe that if we can deepen exchanges with people around the world and help each other, this kind of thing will not happen. I hope that the world will be united and that the abduction issue will be resolved as soon as possible.

Junior High School Category 2nd Prize

(Provisional Translation) What we can do

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9th grade, Saga Prefectural Karatsu Junior High School

When I heard the term “abduction issue by North Korea,” I had no idea what it meant. I also thought it was something that happened a long time ago. However, after watching the anime *Megumi*, I learned a lot of things.

First of all, the abduction issue by North Korea is not completely irrelevant to me, even though it happened a long time ago. People of our parents' generation were abducted in an incident that happened only about 40 years ago. There are still people who have been abducted, and when I thought about how they and their families feel, I was struck by a sadness that is indescribable.

Therefore, I researched what kind of efforts the Japanese people are making for such abductees. What impressed me most was the radio broadcasts for North Korea, such as “Shiokaze” and “Furusato no Kaze,” which are being conducted by the Investigation Commission on Missing Persons and the Government of Japan. Some of the people who actually had listened to the broadcasts in North Korea and now returned to Japan said, “I was moved to hear Japanese on the radio,” or “I was happy to hear Japanese songs as well as news and other information.” I also listened to some of them on YouTube. After the names of the abductees were read out, the audio went on to say, “Those who were abducted and are still alive whose names have not been called, you must know that you are abductees.” Even from this small part of the radio broadcast, I could imagine how helpless the abductees must be. It is so heartbreaking to think that Japanese people like me are suffering so much.

Isn't there anything we can do? When I think about it, it is difficult for junior high school students to directly save the abductees, but I think we can find something we can do in our current lives. The first thing we can do is to learn about this issue and share our opinions with others. This issue is definitely not a story far from us, but I think it is something that we, the people who will be responsible for the future of Japan, should not forget. I believe that by actively exchanging opinions with others, we will be able to take action when we grow up. Secondly, we need to live our current lives with care. I think we should not forget that there are people who have been deprived of their natural lives. We should be grateful that we have been able to live without experiencing unimaginable suffering since birth, that we are able to go to school, and that we are living happily with our families. I am grateful for everything in my life, and I will cherish it. I hope that the day will come when all the abductees will be able to return to Japan and live a happy life.

Junior High School Category 2nd Prize

(Provisional Translation) I will never forget

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I was shocked when I first learned about the abduction issue during my studies at elementary school. I am more afraid of suspicious people and kidnapping than others. I remember how horrified I was just thinking about the fear of being abducted suddenly and taken to a foreign country. When I was in elementary school, all I could think of was that I was scared of the abduction issue.

As a junior high school student, I recently watched the educational anime about the abduction issue, "Megumi". When I was in elementary school, I was only afraid of the abduction, but this time it was different. I naturally found myself thinking about what it would be like if I were in Ms. Megumi's position. She must have been very scared when she was abducted, and how lonely and sad she must have been. The fear of being taken away from her freedom, separated from her family, and taken to a foreign country she didn't know. If I were Megumi, I don't think I could stand it. I wouldn't be able to stop crying and even stand up. I love my family very much, so I can't imagine myself not being able to see them. I was full of anger, wondering why North Korea was committing such a terrible act of "abduction".

I learned not only about Megumi, but also about her family. As family members of an abductee, they were working very hard to get their family back. They were desperate, appealing to the mass media, politicians, and continuing to collect signatures all the time. Of course, Megumi who had been abducted was probably the most in pain, but the families who had their beloved children taken away from them must have been in great pain and sorrow.

After learning about the abduction issue, I wondered if there was anything I could do to help. First of all, I felt that it was important for me to know about the abduction issue correctly. Just watching "Megumi", allowed me to learn a lot; Megumi who was a junior high school student living the same kind of life as us and enjoying every day; the pictures of Ms. Megumi in "Megumi" were full of smiles; the fact that such an ordinary junior high school student has been abducted; the history of efforts to resolve the abduction issue; and the activities and thoughts of the families of the abductees..... I was able to learn a lot of things.

I also learned that there were abductees in my home prefecture, Kagoshima. They are Mr. ICHIKAWA Shuichi and Ms. MASUMOTO Rumiko, who were abducted from Fukiagehama beach. I was surprised to learn that the abduction issue had happened so close to me. I believe that if everyone learns about the abduction issue correctly, something will gradually change from the present situation.

And not only do I want to "know," I want to give my signature for the abduction issue, when I have an opportunity. Since I have yet to encounter such a situation, I would like to actively sign in the petition drive when I encounter it. What I can do is to learn more about the abduction issue correctly, not to forget the abductees and their families, and to cooperate with the petition drive. I would also like to remember this so that I can pass it on to the people around me when I grow up. I will never forget the abduction issue.

High School Category 1st Prize

(Provisional Translation) Time to think again

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I lost my father suddenly last year. He wasn't in the hospital, and of course, he didn't have any life-threatening illness. However one day, it really happened suddenly. When an event that I had only seen in dramas or movies that someone had made up happened to me, I was flustered, hesitated, and wasn't able to move. At the same time, my thoughts completely stopped and I could not think of anything, which I still remember vividly.

The grief of losing a loved one, the bottled-up resentment and hatred, and the sense of loss that piles up day by day. By encountering this situation, I felt as if I had come into contact with the emotions of the families of abductees by North Korea, which I had previously only thought of as someone else's problem.

The first person who comes to mind when I hear the word "abductees by North Korea" is Ms. YOKOTA Megumi. She was abducted on November 15, 1977, and despite numerous requests and meetings with North Korea since then, she has yet to be returned. Most of the news stories so far have ended with the victims' families' "heartbreaking cries and determination not to give up". It was the same scene that I had seen many times since I was in elementary school.

Many more months have passed since then, and I am writing this essay. The question that occupies most of my mind is, "Why is the problem still not solved?"

For example, I had many opportunities to think about the abduction problems in my school classes. This is probably true for everyone, regardless of generation. However, the information we are given is always the same materials and redeveloped images, and the people who receive the information must feel half discouraged and half given up by the fact that there is no progress. It is important not to forget this fact, but is it really enough just to not forget?

Voting for politicians who are committed to resolving the abduction issue, participating in petition, and other such activities are somewhat someone else's business. Although I feel that it's a tough job, I look out of the corner of my eye at the people who are standing on the streets to get signatures, and pass by them cold-heartedly. There is a cold, calculating part of me that says, "There is no way an ant can defeat an uncontrollable elephant." I wonder if the sensibility of the Japanese people, who have lost interest in others over time, has led to the lack of interest in the abduction problems today. In fact, the news of the death of Megumi's father, Mr. YOKOTA Shigeru, was completely covered by the COVID-19 news.

From now on, as the international situation changes, there may be progress toward solving the problem. In the end, unless the consciousness of the people themselves, including myself, changes, essential problems will not be solved. I think it is time to think again. Only from there can anything begin.

High School Category 2nd Prize

(Provisional Translation) The Abduction Issue for "Us"

KUWANO Aoi

12th grade, Kobe Yamate Girls' Junior & Senior High School

“Mom! Dad! Help !”

Megumi’s voice echoed through the ship. Even though I knew it was a line from an anime, I couldn’t help myself from turning my head away. However, this anime “Megumi” is not a fiction, it is a real problem that has not ended.

If I had been in the same situation as Megumi when I was thirteen..... When I thought about this after watching the anime, I thought that I needed to know more about the abduction issue. I immediately started reading the books written by Sakie, Megumi’s mother, and other related books in the school library. However, all I found out was only the cruel truth. The families of the victims were at the mercy of the little information they received from North Korea and the unstable response of the Japanese government. There is a story that I will never forget. When Mr. and Mrs. Yokota visited South Korea, they once went to see a North Korean village near the border. Sakie couldn't help but shout,

“Megumi!”

to the village. Of course, there was no reply. I thought this episode represents how helpless the families of the victims and we are in the abduction issue.

“First, it’s important to know, and then each one of us can raise our voice with awareness of the issues.”

These are the words that are always called out to “us” when we are trying to solve various issues in the world. I, too, thought that was necessary and read books and gathered information on the Internet. However, I had no idea whether or not the abduction issue would be resolved, or how it can be resolved. It has been more than 40 years since Megumi was abducted. Still, there is no clear glimmer of hope. The reunion of parents and children is becoming more difficult and even impossible year by year, and there is nothing that “we” can do about it.

“ I don’t think there is anything I can tell you about the abduction issue.”

I asked my school teacher for advice on writing this essay. The teacher replied,

“In reality, it is unlikely that the abductees will return to Japan in the next few years.

However, the time may come while you are still alive. I believe that what you are thinking and worrying about now is not in vain.”

I was startled. Of course, it is the wish of the current families of the victims to once again embrace their beloved children. However, progress on the abduction issue may not be made until I am an adult. Would it be OK if I ignore it after the family, and even the victims themselves, have passed away? I believe I should always keep the sadness, anger, and responsibility I feel now, and strive for a solution. In addition, it is important for society as a whole to share these feelings and work together. The voices of the abductees and their families are the voices of “us”. “We” will never forget the issue of abductions by North Korea.

High School Category 2nd Prize

(Provisional Translation) Somebody's Daily Life

MIYAWAKI Hinata

10th grade, Hyogo Prefectural Himejiminami High School

I have often heard about the issue of abductions of Japanese citizens by North Korea. I believe that the sorrow and pain of having a beloved family member suddenly disappearing from our daily lives and not knowing if they are still alive is immeasurable. Ms. YOKOTA Megumi, who appeared in the video I saw today, was the same age as me when she was supposed to have been abducted. There is no way she could have immediately understood the situation when she got abducted. If I had been in her position, what could I have done? Would I have been able to resist even a little? I would have been too weak to run away, and I would not have been able to speak up. I'm sure those are what would have happened. Just thinking about it is terrifying.

I did some research on the case of Ms. YOKOTA Megumi, who was abducted. At the time, she was a junior high school student. That made me wonder a little. Why is it that they did not target someone who was a teacher instead if they wanted her to teach Japanese? I found an article that speculated on the reason. It said, "It is possible that they thought it would be easier to brainwash if they had taken her while she was still young. Megumi may have been the one who was caught in North Korea's manipulation network." If this supposition is true, their idea of taking people as mere puppets is really exasperating. I also think it's totally unforgivable. What on earth do they think they are doing with one girl's life, which was full of small happiness, and all the other people who were abducted? If they want to learn Japanese, if they want to let people learn Japanese, there should be so many other ways to do it. No one has the right to take away someone's daily life.

If someone I knew, such as a family member or a friend, was abducted by people from some other country, I would probably hate and loathe not only the criminal but also the country itself. However, this was not the case with Mrs. YOKOTA Sakie, Megumi's mother. In "Megumi," there is a line that goes as follows: "we don't hate or have grudges against the ordinary people living in North Korea. As parents, we just want to rescue our daughter who is still being held captive in North Korea."

It was a very thought-provoking line. She loves Megumi from the bottom of her heart and that is why she is only thinking this way.

The criminal who abducted her may have feared for his life or the lives of his family if he had not done so. However, as I mentioned earlier, no one has a right to take away someone's daily life. Abduction is not something that should be forgiven.

I sincerely hope that the abductees will be able to return home and be reunited with their loved ones as soon as possible.

English Essay Category 1st Prize

A Clue to Solving the Abduction Issue

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“Our families are getting old, and we don’t have much time left. We want our children to step on the soil of their homeland as soon as possible and embrace us.” On September 3, 2021, Sakie Yokota, the mother of Megumi Yokota who was abducted by North Korea, expressed her painful feelings.

It will soon be 44 years since Megumi was abducted by North Korean agents on November 15, 1977. The earnest wishes of the victims’ families have not reached her, “the 13-year-old girl” crying for help in *The Anime “MEGUMI”* and time has gone by.

Last year, without any news of progress toward resolving the abduction issue, we received some sad news. It was the death of Shigeru Yokota, the father of Megumi, who had devoted half his life to resolving the abduction issue along with his wife. His wish to see his daughter again could no longer be fulfilled. In addition to the Yokotas and Megumi’s twin brothers, Takuya and Tetsuya, other families of the abductees have taken steps toward the early resolution through signature campaigns and lectures. To solve this problem, I believe it is important for each and every one of us to take an interest in the abduction issue and take action, starting with small steps. I participate in Kawasaki citizens’ gathering to support abductees’ families online in October to not only know and understand the facts but empathize with the feelings of the victims and their families and be close to their hearts.

Japan is not the only country affected by the abduction issue which has aimed at a peaceful resolution. According to a United Nations survey and report on the abductions, there are 14 countries of origin of the abductees and more than 200,000 people worldwide. The reality that so many people have been affected and so many families have been waiting for the return of the abductees was beyond my imagination. Until now, the abduction issue has tended to be treated as the bilateral issue between Japan and North Korea, but I believe we can find a way to solve this problem by recognizing it as a global issue, building a cooperative system among countries, and working together.

We must seriously face the fact of the abduction issue, and increase those who become interested in this issue by spreading information to more people in order to solve the most important problem for “us”. As a student of the Foreign Language Course, I would like to improve not just my English but Chinese, and internationally convey this abduction, the unforgivable human-rights violations myself. Furthermore, through the International Baccalaureate (IB), I will broaden my horizons, send more effective messages to the international community, and sincerely hope to remind people around the world of compassion and empathy. These will be gradually spun and eventually become a great power.

They don’t have much time left to reunite with their beloved families. It is up to us to create a clue to solve the abduction issue.

English Essay Category 2nd Prize

Hope

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“Have a good day.”

Click, as your mother swings the door shut behind you. All goes well, until you're walking home in the dark with your friends and waving them goodbye at the curb before heading towards the beach shore, 7 minutes away from your house. It sounds like a typical day and feels like one too - until you find yourself surrounded in darkness, locked up in the bottom of a ship.

Misfortune can swoop into one's life and flip it upside down in an instant. Misfortune, such as being “in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

Megumi Yokota was 13 years old - only one year younger than me - I had noted with a jolt - when she was kidnapped from the shores of Niigata in the 1970s on her way home from school. For over 40 years, she has been held captive by authoritarian North Korea.

Imagine being stuck in the cycle of grieving the undead. Her parents and twin brothers spent years dealing with the loss until they learned the truth; she was alive and just across the sea, yet there was nothing they could do.

The complexity of this problem is the lack of information known about North Korea due to their high security, dishonesty and language barrier. Mystery and suspicious behavior surround the country like a death shroud, suppressing our voices along with the possibilities of progress. The government has prolonged Megumi's return to the point where her father, after years of fighting for her freedom, retired to his resting place, his dying wish uncompleted. But does that mean we must surrender to their power and deem her case “mission impossible” ?

Hope is not lost, for it is indeed a thing with feathers. We must stay firm in our stance and not let the truth fade out with time. We cannot afford the government to further prolong Megumi's return.

I, as an individual, have little power and influence. But I can use what little tools I have: writing, the ability to collect information or raise awareness among those unaware of this situation. I can take advantage of my language abilities and youth to communicate with the world using technology and social media, a source unavailable to influencers back in the 1970s. As a young person I would be able to reach out towards a larger audience in the long term. As the tense relationships between North Korea and other countries are gaining more attention than ever, it is essential that we give Megumi's freedom one last push.

These efforts are the least we can do as responsible fellow Japanese citizens or, rather, as moral people with a conscious, knowledgeable mind, sincere emotions from the heart, and a burning passion for justice in our body.

English Essay Category 2nd Prize

Be Aware of Awareness Ribbons!

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It will be 44 years since Megumi Yokota was abducted in Niigata City by North Korean agents. She has yet to be returned. Megumi was only 13 years old when her life, happiness, and dreams were suddenly taken from her. This horrible act took place in the same area my mother is from. As a result, abduction has been a topic that is close to my heart. As a result, I participate in an awareness ribbon campaign to bring attention to abduction. The use of awareness ribbons has positive aspects, but it doesn't work without sharing knowledge. The awareness ribbon campaign is an effective way to make change if we make the opportunity to talk about our ribbons.

Awareness ribbon campaigns involve people wearing a ribbon with a color associated with a cause. Typically, the blue ribbon represents abduction victims' existence and rescue in Japan. The color blue images of the Sea of Japan, which connects Japan and North Korea, as well as the sky which connects abduction victims and families (Community Welfare & Service, 2019). Participating in an awareness ribbon campaign is approachable to many people because they can wear the color as a ribbon, or accessories (Community Welfare & Service Division, 2019). Seeing the associated color can make a statement because it shows support and draws attention to the issue.

Unfortunately, the recognition of awareness ribbon campaigns is low in Japan. I conducted a survey about the recognition of blue ribbons among 65 people and 77% did not know the meaning. While we can say blue ribbon movement is not spreading, a research from Takushoku University showed that 52% of people have experienced volunteering and 69.0% have done charity events (Kanjyo, 2019). In addition, the Niigata government conducted a study about the awareness ribbon and found that in spite of 66.8% of people in Niigata choosing to contribute to the abduction problem by signing up and donating money, only 8.8% chose to contribute by putting on a blue ribbon (Public service & government, 2019). Less opportunity for people to see and hear about awareness ribbons is the reason for the ignorance of this movement.

Even though many people have experience doing volunteer or charity events, they may not know about the awareness ribbon, which means it is not working as well as it should. In order for awareness ribbons to work, those who participate must talk openly about their ribbons so that people are aware of it. Additionally, we should encourage others to participate by wearing the color and offering other ways to help, such as donating money to a registered campaign. Do not be afraid to show your color that brings awareness, and to talk to those around you about the meaning behind the ribbon. And if you see someone wearing a ribbon, ask them! It only works if we talk about it. Maybe one day Megumi will return, but until then, I will continue to wear my ribbon in her memory.