

**International Symposium on Human Rights Violations
including Abductions by North Korea**
- Keynote Speech by Minister of State for the Abduction Issue -

14:00, Wednesday, 10 September 2014
United Nations in Geneva

Dear The Honorable Justice Michael Kirby, Former Chair of the COI; Mr Marzuki Darusman, Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in North Korea; Excellencies, distinguished Speakers, ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon.

My name is Eriko Yamatani, Minister of State for the Abduction Issue of the Government of Japan. On behalf of the Government of Japan, we wish to welcome you and express our deepest appreciation for your participation in the Symposium on Human Rights Violations including Abductions by North Korea. Furthermore, we are grateful for the cooperation extended to us by every concerned parties, especially the United Nations.

The Government of Japan has held symposiums overseas to raise awareness on human rights violations by North Korea including the abductions issue. We feel it is truly significant that we are able to hold this year's symposium in Geneva, a city where international cooperation to resolve North Korean issues on human rights is centrally addressed, in the first week of the 27th (twenty-seventh) Human Rights Council meetings.

As many of you may know, in February, a report of the COI, the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the DPRK, was published to confirm that human rights violations by North Korea in numerous areas including abductions are crimes against humanity. This epoch-making report presents radical recommendations. It recommends North Korea to undertake institutional reforms to introduce genuine checks and balances upon the powers of the Supreme Leader and the Workers' Party of Korea, also recommends the international community to provide support for initiatives to improve the situation. Besides, the report points out the probability that more than one hundred Japanese nationals might have been abducted. In addition to Japanese nationals, the report refers to abductions from not only South Korea but also other countries such as Lebanon, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Romania, France, Italy, Netherlands and China. We wish to express our sincere appreciation to the members of the COI for their efforts in developing this considerable outcome.

After the publication of this report, there has been a series of activities, such as: adoption of a resolution at the Human Rights Council meeting in March; subsequent Arria Formula meetings at UN Security Council; and discussions on the state of the human rights in North Korea at Universal Periodic Review. The momentum to address human rights issues of North Korea at international forums, such as at the UN as a way to improve and resolve this situation, is at higher levels; and our immediate topic is how we can maintain this momentum until the UN General Assembly, which will be held in the latter half of this month. In addition, in our next steps, we will take more specific actions in terms of our follow-up on the COI report, one of which will be establishment of the “field-based structure”. The Government of Japan is ready to fully engage in this process.

Relatedly, there have been communications between North Korea and Japan. North Korea recently launched the Special Investigation Committee with its special mission to investigate all Japanese citizens possibly in North Korea including victims of abduction; and the stance of Japan is to watch its progress carefully on investigations.

This Symposium thus is being held at a critical time in which our efforts concerning human rights in North Korea are moving from a stage to the next one, both at the bilateral and international level. The Government of Japan wishes to make use of today’s event as a strategic opportunity: first, to maintain and raise the momentum on international efforts over this issue; second, to share information, views, and ideas across concerned countries including Japan, international agencies, as well as the global civil society; and third, to deliver an effective message to have North Korea engaged with the global community in the human rights area.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As stated also in the COI report, human rights violations by North Korea are unprecedented anywhere in the world, in the sense that they are systemically conducted as policies of a State. This Symposium has invited as guests those who have been involved actively for many years on revealing, and raising awareness on, serious human rights violations by North Korea, including its direct and indirect victims. These guests, together with the Government of Japan, feel a strong sense of urgency, to say, time is pressing to bring resolutions to the human rights issue in North Korea. We kindly ask our audience to listen to their voice and to deepen empathy towards them.

Abductions of Japanese nationals, which many of you know, is one of such serious human rights violations by North Korea. The country forcefully abducted innocent Japanese: this is a serious breach of Japan’s sovereignty and equal to terrorism.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The cartoon and movie on your desk tells a story about Ms. Megumi Yokota, then thirteen-year-old Japanese school girl when abducted by North Korea. Her mother often testifies one symbolic episode of the cruelty of the abductions, which was given by a former North Korean agent: The innocent girl was

locked up alone in a tiny, lightless hold of a spy boat. She had been screaming over and over for her mother in vain, “Mommy, help me, save me!!”, scratching insanely the iron wall of the cold hold on the whole way to North Korea. When she arrived at an unknown coast of North Korea, all of her nails were bloody peeled off.

Today, we are in the presence of Mr. Teruaki Masumoto whose sister is a victim of abduction by North Korea. Japanese police authorities has been investigating 883 (eight hundred and eighty three) persons whose possibility of abduction by North Korea cannot be ruled out. We also have Ms. Tamaji Takeshita today, whose sister was one of them.

The Government of Japan has been fully involved in resolution of the abduction issue, guided by Prime Minister Abe, who has determinedly stated: “The Abe Administration shall resolve the abduction issue. My mission shall not be complete until the day the abductees are able to once again embrace their family members.” A result of this determination is the start of investigations by North Korea’s Special Investigation Committee, which I mentioned earlier.

We still cannot loosen our grips, as we yet do not know what North Korea would come up with when they first inform us of the status of their investigation. However, at any rate, we are of the belief that the performance of North Korea during the process of this investigation, and forthcoming reports, have critical significance, which affect not only the issue of abductions of Japanese nationals. We believe that this will function even as an important test to see the seriousness of North Korea’s commitment towards our shared goal, namely, the resolution and improvements upon human rights in North Korea.

The leadership of North Korea must take both serious and specific actions towards resolutions of the human rights issue by making the right decision from broader and humanitarian perspectives. Doing so will enable North Korea to take a first step towards achieving, with dignity, harmony with other countries including Japan. And a very opportunity to do just this is now in the hands of North Korea. The leadership of North Korea should recognize this opportunity.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The international community will continue to face important phases in moving towards resolutions to the human rights problem in North Korea. Japan will continue to perform our own role in the international community in cooperating with you and many of our concerned parties.

Lastly, I would like to close my speech by stressing my hope that this Symposium will serve to maintain, and push, this heightened momentum to resolve the human rights issue in North Korea.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.