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# Bring Them Home

## Abductions by North Korea are a universal human rights issue

Imagine a loved one being suddenly abducted from home and carried off to an unfamiliar place abroad. At least 17 Japanese, possibly many more, were abducted to North Korea decades ago. The families of abductees have been waiting for their return, but only five of them have come back to Japan. The others are still missing, and this brutal crime remains unresolved today.

### A daughter ripped from her family

Yokota Megumi has long been a symbol of the plight of abductees and their families. She was abducted to North Korea from Niigata Prefecture in 1977 at age 13. Pyongyang admitted to abducting her but claimed she died in the early 1990s. However, North Korea has not yet provided any convincing explanation or evidence for this claim. In November 2004, Pyongyang provided what it claimed were Ms. Yokota's remains, but forensic analysis detected DNA that is not hers.

"My image of my sister is frozen in time from when I was 9 years old," said Yokota Takuya, Ms. Yokota's brother. "I'm worried about how she

is living now, and I want our family to be reunited as soon as possible."

The Government of Japan has so far identified 17 Japanese citizens who were abducted by North Korea, including the five who returned in 2002. In addition, there are other cases where the possibility of abduction cannot be ruled out.

The exact reasons why North Korea committed these crimes are unclear. The Government of Japan believes they may include disguising North Korean agents as Japanese citizens, and forcing abductees to train North Korean agents to act Japanese. Families of abductees have joined hands with the Government of Japan to raise awareness of abductions as a human rights issue affecting the entire international community.

Citizens of other countries were also abducted by North Korea. They may include David Sneddon, an American who disappeared in China in 2004.

"Only despotic regimes and leaders without conscience would do such inhumane acts," said James Sneddon, David's brother.

### Timeline: Abductions by North Korea

#### 1970s-1980s

Many Japanese were abducted by North Korea.

#### 2014

The Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the DPRK submits its Final Report to the U.N. Human Rights Council.

#### 1997

Association of Families of Victims Kidnapped by North Korea is established.

#### 2018

Following a similar measure in 2016 by the U.S. House of Representatives, the U.S. Senate adopts a resolution expressing concern about the disappearance of David Sneddon.

#### 2002

First Japan-North Korea Summit meeting. Kim Jong Il admits to the abductions. Five Japanese abductees return to Japan.

#### 2019

U.S. President Donald Trump raises the abductions with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

#### 2005

U.N. General Assembly adopts its first resolution on the situation of human rights in North Korea.

#### 2022 January

Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio holds a teleconference with U.S. President Biden and asks for continued cooperation for the immediate resolution of the abductions issue. President Biden offers renewed support.

### A new generation takes up the struggle

As the years pass, Japanese abductees' loved ones are aging and dying.

"Since 2002, not a single abductee has returned," said Iizuka Koichiro, whose mother Taguchi Yaeko was abducted in 1978 when he was a baby. "Our goal is the immediate return of all abductees."

Ms. Taguchi's brother Iizuka Shigeo, who raised her son Koichiro as his own, died in 2021, never having been reunited with his sister. He was 83. Similarly, Ms. Yokota's father passed away in 2020 at age 87 after years of campaigning to rescue his daughter from North Korea.

In an example of how the families are passing on their crusade to the next generation, Mr. Yokota Takuya recently succeeded the late Mr. Iizuka as head of the Association of Families of Victims Kidnapped by North Korea, while the younger Mr. Iizuka became secretary general.

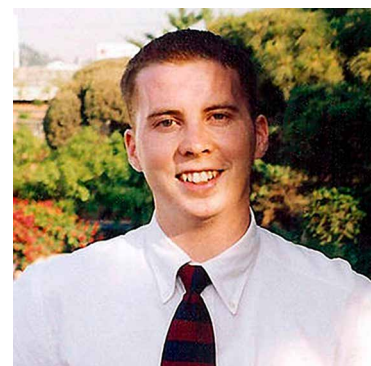
"Forty-four years have passed since my sister was abducted. I have to fight as the third head of our association, filling me with silent but profound anger," said Mr. Yokota. "My message to Chairman Kim Jong Un is if all abductees are returned, North Korea and Japan can ensure a bright future and

realize peace. I look forward to your brave, courageous decision."

Mr. Yokota and Mr. Iizuka spoke about the families' suffering at an international symposium hosted by the Government of Japan to call for international cooperation to resolve the abductions issue as a global issue. Held on December 11, 2021, in Tokyo to highlight North Korean Human Rights Abuses Awareness Week, the event brought together relatives of abductees from Japan and other countries, students, politicians and international affairs experts, both in person and online.

### A pressing global issue

There has been international coordination on this issue. In 2019, U.S. President



The U.S. Congress passed resolutions about David Sneddon, an American who disappeared in China in 2004.

**"Only despotic regimes and leaders without conscience would do such inhumane acts."**

James Sneddon

Donald Trump raised the abductions issue with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in their summit talks. Prime Minister Kishida has prioritized the abductions issue as the top issue of his administration, affirming international cooperation with U.S. President Joe Biden.

In December 2021, the U.N. General Assembly adopted a resolution condemning human rights violations by North Korea including the abductions of Japanese and South Korean citizens. It was the 17th consecutive year that the world body has endorsed such a resolution.

"There has never been a time when international partnership in terms of countermeasures against North Korea and resolving the abductions issue has been so important," Nishino Junya, a professor of political science at Keio University, said at the symposium. "Partnership with Japan's ally the U.S., with which North Korea is keen to improve relations, is indispensable...As mentioned by the families of the abductees, resolution of the abductions issue is urgent. We have no luxury of time. So, policy coordination must be done immediately and Japan must take the lead."

"The Biden administration has repeatedly emphasized human rights as a pillar of our U.S. foreign policy ... [and] has also underlined multilateralism as another

pillar," said Greg Scarlatoiu, Executive Director of the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea. "However difficult it may be, the international community must resolve this critical issue."

"We will make utmost efforts to realize the return home of all abductees at the earliest possible date without missing any chance," said Matsuno Hirokazu, Chief Cabinet Secretary and Minister in Charge of the Abduction Issue.

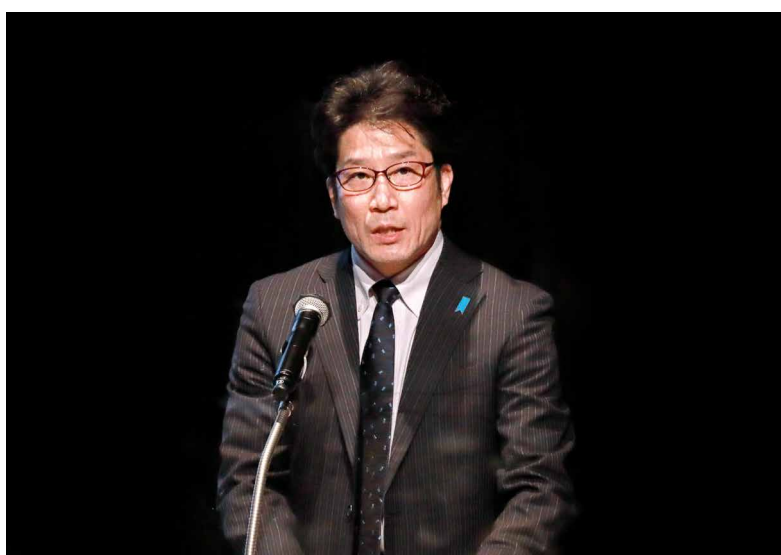
The Government of Japan continues to push for international cooperation to resolve the abductions issue. This is an issue concerning Japan's sovereignty and the lives of its people. With close cooperation with the international community including the United States, Japan will make its utmost efforts to bring our people home.



Matsuno Hirokazu, Chief Cabinet Secretary and Minister in Charge of the Abduction Issue, says families must be reunited.

**"We will make utmost efforts to realize the return home of all abductees at the earliest possible date without missing any chance"**

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Yokota Takuya appeals for the return of all abductees.

**"I want our family to be reunited as soon as possible."**

Yokota Takuya