



 Working toward early rescue of all Japanese abductees !

# North Korean Human Rights Abuses Awareness Week Essay Contest 2019

## Awarded Essays

Hosted by the Headquarters for the Abduction Issue, the Government of Japan.

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North Korean Human Rights Abuses Awareness Week Essay Contest 2019

Junior High School Category 1st Prize

Thinking about Our Futures in the Light of the Abductions Issue

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When I researched the issue of the abduction of Japanese citizens by North Korea, I was shocked. Learning that YOKOTA Megumi in particular was abducted at the time she was a junior high school student, as I am now, I felt that if I had been in Megumi's position I would have been fearful, not knowing what would happen next, and full of anxiety, thinking that I might never see my family and friends again. I also felt that Megumi's family and the families of the other abductees were suddenly robbed of precious happiness and left to live in despair.

Despite the sadness, Megumi's parents continue to campaign for her for many years, believing that she is safe, and I understood why, even when North Korea reported that she had died, they could not possibly accept those reports. It is obviously not acceptable to claim simply that someone abducted for selfish reasons is now dead. Additionally, when I learned that the returned remains, which were said to be Megumi's, were not actually hers, I felt extremely angry. Human life was being treated far too lightly. If they thought how the families of the abductees must feel, they definitely would not be able to commit these acts that take people for fools.

However, not thinking seriously about human life, death or human rights is also something that can be said of current junior high school students. In my school life, I frequently hear people using heartless or unpleasant words. People who use such words should understand how what they say can hurt other people, and the true meaning of the words they are using, and think once again about how they are using them. I also think the people who hear other people using such language should stop letting the matter slide without treating it seriously. It is a problem that heartless words that hurt other people will be increasingly used without thought if nobody calls them out. That is why I think that we all need more opportunities to think about human rights.

For that reason, I have decided to start researching and raising awareness of human rights violations including the abductions of Japanese citizens by North Korea. I believe that only few junior high school students know well about the various human rights issues that occurred in the past. That is because some of these events occurred before we were born and we have few opportunities to learn about them in the course of our daily lives. As such, I would like to

tell other junior high school students about the human rights issues that have occurred. If they can have just a little interest in these issues, this might be an opportunity to study more about those issues and to think about human rights of each person. Even right now, human rights violations occur here and there, including discrimination against women and prejudice against people with disabilities. However, if we, while we are junior high school students, can raise our awareness of the importance of human rights, then we will not discriminate when we enter society. I hope that we can create a future without discrimination and prejudice where we can mutually show respect for each other's human rights.

North Korean Human Rights Abuses Awareness Week Essay Contest 2019

Junior High School Category 2nd Prize

For Freedom and Happiness for Everyone

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I learned about YOKOTA Megumi when I was in the fourth year of elementary school. I remember that when I saw the image of a charming young girl in a kimono shown in a poster hung up on our school bulletin board, it left such an impression on me that I asked my mother about it. I recall her telling me "she was abducted, taken overseas, and still cannot not come home". However, at that time, I was unable to imagine the tragedy the young girl and her family had been through or the deep feelings encapsulated in the phrase "we won't stop until we bring her back home", as written on the poster.

Recently, when I watched the animation "Megumi", I was extremely shocked to learn about the unbelievable sequence of events that led to the abductions that so affected Megumi and her family. Abduction is a criminal act that tramples over human dignity. It must not be allowed to happen. What are they trying to achieve by taking away someone's freedom and happiness? Don't the people who committed the abduction feel any guilt as the abduction is a serious crime? Megumi should have been able to choose her own future, dreams, family and friendships, but all of them were all denied her when she was taken away to a land she did not know. What went through her mind? How did she survive? How have the family spend over the long years, after she was forced to leave behind? They must be feeling anger and sadness on the loss of family members, and be struggling with the issue by making their emotions turn into the strong will, namely "We surely bring them back". When I consider the feeling of these families who are confronting the issue in this way, I have started to feel a sense of powerlessness for myself, who can do nothing. However, we must not allow such feelings of powerlessness to take over and turn our backs on the issue emotionally I realized that what I could do is to deeply understand the abductions issue, maintain an interest in the issue as an ongoing problem, and also empathize with the feelings of the victims and their families with an imagination. These may be only small steps, but if people all across Japan feel the same way, we should be able to create a force that can drive towards the resolution of this problem.

One scene of the animation, Megumi's mother Sakie was trying to raise awareness among passers in a street, was impressive. "We do not hate or despise ordinary people living in North Korea". The reason why she was able to say these words despite living with deep anger and sadness is that she understands the unreasonableness to be forced to suffer without any crime

more than anyone. Hearing Sakie's words, I realize that we must consider the people who ordered the abduction separately from the ordinary people of North Korea and that we should not hate North Korea as a country. An abduction victim, HASUIKE Kaoru, also describes in his book the struggles of ordinary North Korean people against the strict regime, hunger, and poverty. Is it simply idealism to think that we should try to extend our empathy to people who are living under different social systems and always try to understand each other through dialogue rather than engage in conflict?

In the international community, we must go beyond differences of ethnicity, come together and cooperate, and build true ties of friendship in order to respect the human rights of everyone. I want to believe that wishing for this will without doubt lead us towards the resolution of the abductions issue.

North Korean Human Rights Abuses Awareness Week Essay Contest 2019

Junior High School Category 2nd Prize

What We Can Do to Address the Abductions Issue

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How many people in Japan know about the "abductions issue"? Last year, in our morality class, which was attended by all of the school's students, we watched the animation "Megumi". This was the first time for me to pick up cards outlining the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The cards summarize the international treaty developed for children to live each day in peace.

YOKOTA Megumi was abducted by North Korea on the way home from school when she was 13 years old. Her daily life ground to a halt and her bright future was suddenly taken away. Watching the animation "Megumi", I could understand the fear and deep sadness Megumi must have felt, and I felt pain in my heart.

Before I watch the animation, I knew a little about the abductions issue but after watching I began wanting to know more. I felt that Megumi also had rights that should have been protected under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and I began to feel an increasingly strong desire to see the abductions issue resolved as quickly as possible.

Later, I frequently saw the abductions issue covered on various television programs and newspaper articles. A television program I saw in February of this year made a particularly strong impression on me. Abductees and their families spoke directly with young people who did not know about the abductions issue, in the program. "What would you do if one of your family members suddenly disappeared?" The abductees and their families posed the questions to the young people. Their various answers included "I would look for them", "I would call the police", and "I would try to gather information over social media". I think I would do all three of those things, if it were for a family member I love. I think these are obvious steps to take for the happiness of your family. Happiness with a family is not a matter of course.

During the program, Megumi's mother Sakie also called for the resolution of the abductions issue saying "I will continue fighting until my daughter comes home". Sakie's desperation struck my heart. I understood the abductions are something that could've happened to anyone and that it would be extremely painful were I to be in the position of the left-behind families.

In a local newspaper, I also read about the petition drives, donation campaigns, public speaking events, and symposiums the abductees and their family members organized to try and resolve the abductions issue. I realized that the majority of people participating in those activities were senior citizens. I thought that as the abductions took place more than 40 years ago perhaps many members of the younger generations do not know about the issue.

That is why I would like to spread more awareness of the issue among younger people to ensure that it is not forgotten. I would therefore like to propose what we can do. Firstly, I want to create wider awareness of the problem among younger people. What if we organize numerous symposiums and events for younger people to discuss the resolution of the abductions issue? This will provide more opportunities to learn and take an interest. I also think that we need to seek younger volunteers to help in the activities of abductees and their family members.

My earnest wish is for the Japanese people to come together as one, raise our awareness of the abductions issue, and find a solution that returns Megumi and the other abductees to Japan.



North Korean Human Rights Abuses Awareness Week Essay Contest 2019

High School Category 1st Prize

Time to "Think and Act"

NAGASAWA Pati Akitosh, 3rd grade, Yamagata Prefectural Yamagata Higashi High School

A photograph was published in the newspaper. It showed a wooden boat that drifted ashore in Yuza Town, Yamagata Prefecture. Inscribed on the boat, which was badly damaged, was the Korean script. The article explained that the boat had probably drifted from North Korea. As, only a few months previously, I had watched the animation "Megumi", thought that the abductions issue is something that relates to me personally, and decided to enter the essay competition for North Korean Human Rights Abuses Awareness Week, this was not an article I could simply read through quickly. That is because, as I studied the abductions issue, I learned that North Korean agents carried out the abductions using small boats and dinghies. I even briefly wondered if it could be happening again.

"We have already reached the limits of our patience". "We really don't have any more time". "We want to see them". These were the heartfelt cries for help we heard from the families of the abductees in their video message. For more than 40 years since the abductions, an unforgivable act orchestrated by the government of North Korea, the lives of the abductees and their families have been distorted. The blue Japan Sea has continually stood as an obstacle to their lives, dreams and hopes of the abductees and their families. The abductions issue is a crime, an international human rights violation that cannot be solved by the passage of time. As the abductees and their family members grow older, the abductees need to be home as quickly as possible and there is no time to waste. Prime Minister Abe has said "I am determined to meet Chairman Kim Jong-un myself face to face, without attaching any conditions. Upon a calm analysis, we will not miss any opportunities to take bold action". The Japanese government will continue dialog with North Korea with resolute determination. Without doubt, our individual voices can support that effort.

Here is a survey of public opinion which has produced some interesting results. The survey was aimed for grasp public opinion regarding diplomatic issues and was conducted in October, 2018. For the question in the survey regarding interests connected to North Korea, the most common answer was the abductions issue, selected by 81.4% of responses. However, when we analyze the respondents by age group, we can see that the degree of interest was only 70.4% among those aged between 18 and 29, followed by the missile and nuclear weapons issues. Young people have their opinions. Young people have their energy. To raise public awareness of this issue, the active participation of us, the younger generations, who will carry

Japan and the world's future, is indispensable. More important than anything is the opportunity in order to arouse awareness and take positive action. As a concrete plan, I propose that the government organize a nationwide summit for junior high school and high school students to think about the issue of abductions by North Korea. At the summit, participants could watch the "Megumi" animation and hear messages from the abductees' family members. Participants could also engage in vibrant discussions and debates, exploring what they could do. Such an opportunity would not only lead to deeper understanding and perspectives on the abductions issue, it would also make a major contribution to the construction of a network of participants. The participants could then harness that network to act as messengers in Japan's various regions, telling those around them about the issue and working to widen the scope of awareness. Wider awareness can serve as an engine that helps drive a solution to the issue.

As a Japanese citizen I will, until the abductees and their family members are able to join hands once again, continue to actively and independently "think and act" on this issue.

North Korean Human Rights Abuses Awareness Week Essay Contest 2019

High School Category 2nd Prize

Don't Just Wish, Take Action

YAMAGUCHI Rinka, 1st grade, Ehime Prefectural Imabari Kita High School

"Mum!... Dad!..."

In the dusty cargo hold of a boat is a young girl. The boat creates rough waves as it leaves Japan. The girl's own will has been completely ignored.

It was 44 years ago that the girl, YOKOTA Megumi, was abducted by North Korea. Decades before I was born, Megumi was already outside Japan. For as long as I can remember, up until today, I have repeatedly seen press conferences with Megumi's parents. But despite this, somewhere in my heart I felt that this is an issue that does not relate to me directly. I felt it was an issue between countries. However, I realized this was a big mistake. After becoming a high school student, I had another opportunity to think about the abductions issue when I saw the animation "Megumi".

The animation showed an ordinary family. The Yokota family was full of love, living together happily. However, ruthless abduction, which happened in an instant, changed the fates of Megumi and all of those around her. I watched press conferences with Megumi's parents again online. The strong calls for her return, her photos, their tears... I felt various different emotions all at once. How many tears must Megumi's parents have cried? How much must they have suffered? How long must it have taken them, despite everything, to stand back up and move to take action, knowing that holding their heads up and going forward was the only thing they could do? Megumi must also have felt the same pain. In fact, her pain must have been even worse. For the 17 abductees and their families, we will deepen our understanding of the current state of the abductions issue and should think about what we can do for them. What can I do as a high school student? Firstly, I can encourage the people around me to understand the issue. Please go online and search for "Government internet television animation Megumi". The animation will help you understand the tragedy of the abductions. I expect that anyone who watches the animation will be moved by it and will not be able to dismiss the abductions as something that does not concern them. On the website, it is also possible to post opinions and comments. The second thing I can do is to post on social media about this issue, like I did in this essay. By calling out to people around the world, I may be able to increase the number of people who will empathize and take action. The third thing I can do is to donate. Do you know about the Blue Ribbon badge? This blue ribbon is available

for everyone at a price of 500 yen per piece. We can donate by paying for the ribbon. By wearing the badge, we can represent our will for the resolution of the abduction issue. I have attached it to my school bag. You see, there are many things we can do. You mustn't just say "I don't know about this" or "there is no opportunity to do anything". Take steps to get involved in the problem. Nothing will happen if we just wait. We must all stand up together as Japanese citizens. "I'm home".

This is a word, I want to hear from Megumi.

North Korean Human Rights Abuses Awareness Week Essay Contest 2019

High School Category 2nd Prize

Forgotten by the Passing Time

SEKIYAMA Haruto 2nd grade, Keiai Gakuen Senior High School

This year, I watched the animation "Megumi" once again. When I watched the animation last year, I was forced to realize that I was ignorant about the North Korean abductions issue. I still clearly remember how I felt anger at myself for living an easy life even though the victims of the abductions were living with so much sadness and suffering. However, this time, I held back those feelings so that I could truly think once again about what we and the government need to do to resolve the abduction issue.

Before watching the animation "Megumi" last year, I simply had the extremely shallow, superficial notion "how sad it is for the abductees". I feel that many other minors in Japan, as well as adults, also have a very low awareness of the abductions issue. I think that we do not only need to resolve the abductions issue, we also need to address the issue of this low level of awareness. That is why I think that we need two respective policies for resolving this issue, domestic one and one international one.

Firstly, in order to improve the awareness among us, we, Japanese, need to cover the abductions issue in our classes at school. For example, students can watch the animation "Megumi" in a class, so that students can be aware of the cruelty and suffering inflicted by the abductions, and then students write honestly how they felt. We can also hold discussions in class for students to share their opinions. This would allow us to gain a deeper understanding of the abductions issue and students, including myself, would be able to learn mutually from each other. In addition, I think that the government can call for cooperation with social network services such as Twitter and video-sharing sites such as YouTube, for adults to foster the exchange of opinions widely through society.

Secondly, in order to make this a multilateral issue rather than an issue that a smaller number of countries involved, I think that Japan needs to take the initiative. Up until now, I think that we have requested the cooperation of the United States in order to build cooperative systems and moved towards the resolution of this issue, but my personal feeling is that this action is not sufficient. That is why I think we should build cooperative relationships with all of the 12 countries that are victims of the abductions, including Thailand and France. If these countries appealed to the international community, countries that were previously disinterested will

develop interests and cooperations.

What I'm most afraid of on this issue is that Japanese people will lose interest about the abduction issue and that as the abductees and their families grow older, they will be forgotten by time. Now, as the era in Japan has changed from Heisei to Reiwa, I am convinced that if we, the Japanese people, prevent awareness of the issue from fading, cooperate together with many countries, and take the initiative, we will be able to find a solution to this issue.