

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am HAYASHI Yoshimasa, Chief Cabinet Secretary of Japan. I concurrently hold the post of Minister in charge of the abductions issue. On behalf of the Government of Japan, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the United States, Australia, the Republic of Korea and the European Union for co-hosting today's symposium. I am also grateful for the families of victims participating not only from Japan but also from the United States and Thailand, as well as panelists who are also here with us. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the United Nations colleagues as well for convening today's symposium, as well as your understanding and cooperation for the immediate resolution of the abductions issue.

The Government of Japan has identified 17 Japanese citizens as victims of abduction by North Korea. Moreover, there are many other missing people for whom the possibility of abduction by North Korea cannot be ruled out. Since five of the abductees returned to Japan in October 2002, any single abductee has not returned to Japan. It is truly regrettable, and we take this fact very seriously.

The abductions issue is not something that happened in the past, but it remains an ongoing international challenge, which we need to resolve immediately. The abductees are still deprived of their freedom and barred from returning home. In my meetings with the victims' families, I have heard first-hand about their years of sorrow and pain. I have visited the spot in Niigata where the 13-year-old girl, Miss YOKOTA Megumi, was abducted in 1977. It was a quiet residential area facing the sea over just a street, and it feels quite similar to my hometown Shimonoseki, which made me painfully aware that something similar might have happened to my two now grown-up daughters.

The abductions issue is not a mere incident or accident but a violation of basic human rights which should be protected universally. Furthermore, Japan is not the only country whose own citizens have been abducted by North Korea. Therefore, we believe even more that close cooperation with the international community is crucial toward the resolution of the abductions issue. Prime Minister Kishida has asked the national leaders for their continued understanding and cooperation toward the immediate resolution of the abductions issue on various occasions, including the Summit meeting with Australia last November, with the U.S. in April, and with the ROK in May and at the G7 summit this month, and once again gained their full support. The

international community has been showing our strong determination also in the United Nations. The resolutions on the Situation of Human Rights in the DPRK, which include reference to the abductions issue, have been adopted at the Human Rights Council 17 times for 17 consecutive years and at the General Assembly 19 times for 19 consecutive years. Let me take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the understanding and cooperation of the international community.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Japan's basic position on North Korea is to seek to normalize the relations with North Korea in accordance with the Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration of 2002, through comprehensively resolving outstanding issues of concern, such as the abductions, nuclear, and missile issues as well as settlement of our unfortunate past. In particular, with the aging of the abductees and their families, the abductions issue is a humanitarian and time-sensitive issue with no time to spare. In Japan, the sense of urgency is growing ever stronger among the public, not to mention among the families of the victims.

Establishing fruitful relations between Japan and North Korea meets the interests of both sides, and will greatly contribute to the peace and stability of the region. However, the longer the current situation drags on, the more difficult it becomes to realize new relations between Japan and North Korea. We must waste no time and boldly change the current situation.

Prime Minister Kishida has expressed his intention to pursue high-level talks under his direct supervision toward holding a summit meeting with President Kim Jong Un. It is crucial to build relations that will allow both leaders to hold honest and candid discussions in order for them to address such a difficult challenge as resolution of the outstanding issues of concern between the two. We will continue to call for North Korea to make decisions together with us from a broader perspective, overcoming every obstacle, for the peace and stability of the region and international community as well as for both Japan and North Korea.

I strongly hope today's symposium will contribute to increased awareness on the abductions issue and raising momentum in the international community for its immediate resolution.

Thank you very much.