

CONTENT FROM THE GOVERNMENT OF JAPAN

Abductions of Japanese citizens by North Korea: Decades after their disappearance, only one parent generation left.

Imagine that one day, out of the blue, a friend or family member disappears and are taken abroad. For decades you and your loved ones have been torn apart. Well, not so long ago, at least 17 Japanese people were abducted by North Korea. There are many other cases in which the possibility of abduction cannot be ruled out.

This is not a thing of the past. After so many years of denial, North Korea finally admitted to the abductions of Japanese citizens in 2002. However, only five of the abductees have returned to Japan. North Korea continues to claim that the abductions issue has already been resolved, stating that the remaining abductees either never entered its territory or have since died, with extremely unnatural and unconvincing explanations, including the provision of “remains” from which DNA belonging to someone else was detected through DNA testing. The victims are still waiting for help.

It has been far too long.

Abduction of a 13-year-old girl

YOKOTA Megumi was abducted from the shores of Japan in 1977 at the age of 13 on her way home from school. She is 60 now. Her mother, Sakie, now 89, says, “Megumi, a junior high school student back then, always came home and said in a loud voice, ‘Mom, I’m back,’ and told me about the day’s events. I have been missing her voice for 47 years.”

Only one parent generation left

Time is limited. Akihiro, the 96-year-old father of ARIMOTO Keiko, who was abducted during her study in Europe in 1983, has just passed away in February 2025. Sakie has become the only alive parent of the 12 abductees who are identified by the Government of Japan and still have not returned to Japan. Megumi’s brother, YOKOTA Takuya, who has presided over the Association of Families of Victims Kidnapped by North Korea (AFVKN) since 2021, emphasizes the need to reunite the parents who are still living with their abducted children: “Even if the parents are in good health today, they may not be tomorrow,” he says. “Supposing that the abductees were able to return home one day, if it was after their parents had passed away, we would, if anything, explode in anger.”

Strong bonds with the U.S.

The Government of Japan and the Japanese people appreciate the bipartisan support in the U.S. for the resolution of the abductions issue. Since North Korea first admitted to the abduction of Japanese citizens in 2002, successive U.S. presidents have met with the families of the abductees, and the U.S. has repeatedly confirmed its support and cooperation on this issue at the leaders’ level and other levels as well. President Trump also referred to the abduction of Megumi in his address to the UN General



YOKOTA Megumi, with her mother and brothers

Assembly in 2017 and met with the families of Japanese abductees twice, in 2017 and 2019. It was significant that President Trump conveyed Japan’s position on the abductions issue to President Kim Jong-Un multiple times during the U.S.-North Korea leaders’ meetings.

The hopes of fathers and mothers

The families were particularly impressed with President Trump’s support during his first administration. YOKOTA Sakie received a letter from President Trump at the time of her husband Shigeru’s passing in 2020. ARIMOTO Akihiro also received a reply from the president in response to his letter in 2019 and he deeply appreciated the warmth and thoughtfulness of the president. YOKOTA Takuya said, “If the U.S.-North Korea leaders’ meeting will be held again, I would like President Trump to definitely take that opportunity to discuss heading toward the resolution of the abductions issue.”

The question of abductions by North Korea is not just a Japanese issue. The U.S. House and Senate have passed resolutions expressing concern and calling for an investigation into the truth about the disappearance of Mr. David Sneddon, an American citizen who may have been abducted by North Korea in 2004 during his stay in China.

Efforts of Japan

The abductions issue is a humanitarian and time-sensitive issue with no time to spare and is a top priority for the current Japanese prime minister ISHIBA’s administration. The Minister in charge of the abduction issue is currently HAYASHI Yoshimasa, who also serves as the chief cabinet secretary, a key position in the cabinet. At the Online Symposium in the UN on the Abductions Issue co-hosted by the governments of Japan, the United States and other countries, he appealed for the international community’s understanding and cooperation toward the immediate resolution of the abductions issue.

At the symposium, IIZUKA Koichiro, Secretary-General of the AFVKN, whose mother was abducted in 1978 when he was one-year-old, called for North Korea and President Kim Jong-Un to “make a wise and bold decision to move forward to a new and constructive future for their prosperity”.

Japan’s basic policy on North Korea is to achieve the normalization of relations with North Korea, in accordance with the Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration signed in 2002 by the then leaders of Japan and North Korea, through comprehensively resolving outstanding issues of concern, such as the abductions, nuclear and

missile issues, as well as settlement of the unfortunate past.

Prime Minister ISHIBA himself has a strong determination to lead efforts toward the resolution of this issue. At the first summit meeting in February 2025, Prime Minister ISHIBA asked for continued understanding and cooperation of the U.S. for the immediate resolution of the abductions issue and gained full support from President Trump.

In close cooperation with the international community, including the United States, Japan will do its utmost to achieve the immediate return of all abductees.



Watch now

 JAPAN GOV THE GOVERNMENT OF JAPAN



“I am greatly counting on the Trump administration because of his strength,” says YOKOTA. “I fervently hope that President Trump will make a significant push for the abductees’ return home.”

— YOKOTA Sakie



“When we met, President Trump leaned forward and listened to us. We are connected heart-to-heart. I hope he will once again give hope to the families of the abductees,” ARIMOTO said in January, 2025.

— ARIMOTO Akihiro (deceased in February 2025)



“The abductions issue is by no means just something that happened in the past,” says HAYASHI. “It is an ongoing challenge, in which the abductees are still deprived of their freedom and barred from returning home.”

— HAYASHI Yoshimasa