

Thank you very much for the kind introduction. As introduced, I am Yutaka Kobayashi, member of the Diet of Japan from the Liberal Democratic Party, and this is the second time I have participated in the IPCNKR meetings. Please allow me to express my gratitude to the organizers for giving me the opportunity to deliver a keynote speech at today's assembly. It is indeed an honor for me to address such a distinguished group.

Since last year's Tokyo meeting, there have been several key developments in Japan's understanding of the North Korean Refugee and Human Rights Issues. As a result, people's interest in these issues is on the rise in Japan.

Facing North Korea's nuclear development or abduction issues, Japanese people have been questioning what kind of country is North Korea and what kind of person is Chairman Kim Jon-il who leads a military dictatorship? To answer those questions, it is an almost daily occurrence for Japanese TV programs, newspapers, and magazines to focus on the situation within North Korea. A steady stream of domestic and international media broadcasts show the Japanese public the everyday conditions faced by ordinary North Koreans who have no choice but to live in such a poor environment. The media also shows the vivid testimony and pictures of North Korean refugees who hide in China or other countries. Media reporting of these issues has increased awareness of human rights condition in North Korea among Japanese people.

This past April, family members of Japanese abduction victims visited Washington, D.C. to testify before Congress and to meet with President Bush. In May, these same members visited South Korea to meet family members of Korean abduction victims. News regarding the abduction issue also focuses on the criticism from the international community on how the abductions show a lack of regard for human rights by North Korea.

In June of this year, the Japanese government enacted the “North Korea Human Rights Law” as a step to contribute to the improvement of human rights in North Korea. The law requires the Japanese government to implement measures to protect and support North Korean refugees. As we know, it is the poor condition of domestic human rights that force many North Koreans to seek refuge elsewhere. We debated this law vigorously and thoroughly in the Diet. The result was a co-sponsored bill with the Democratic Party whose members are also attending this year’s meeting. I believe, and I hope my Democratic Party counterparts will agree, that the passage of this legislation represents a positive step in the relationship between the ruling party and the largest opposition party. Our ability to cooperate shows how North Korean human rights truly impacts Japan’s national interest.

In addition, within the LDP we have established the “Investigation Team on North Korean Refugees” based on the enactment of North Korean Human Rights Law. The team examines specifically what measures Japan can take to support North Korean escapees. Later today, My colleague Mr.Hanashi, a director of the team, will comment on the team’s investigation to date.

As you might be aware, both the abduction of Japanese citizens issue and North Korean refugee issue are important for Japanese when it comes to human rights of North Korea. From the 1970s through the 1980s, many Japanese disappeared unnaturally. Later, investigations by Japanese authorities and testimony by defecting North Korean agents revealed that these incidents were highly suspected to be abductions by North Korea. The Japanese government has identified over 16 abduction victims.

In September 2002, Prime Minister Koizumi became the first Japanese Prime Minister to visit North Korea when he attempted to make progress on the abduction issue. At that time and following years of denial, National Defense Chairman Kim Jon-il finally acknowledged his country’s role in the abductions. He formally apologized and promised to prevent a recurrence.

As a direct result of Koizumi's initiative, some abduction victims and their family members realized their return home. However, the subsequent response of North Korea has proven unsatisfactory for the Japanese government and people. It is not an exaggeration to say that North Korea has been insincere regarding the case of Megumi Yokota whom North Korea abducted when she was still a child. Also, regarding the other abduction victims, there is no material evidence or information offered to back up the official explanations of North Korea.

To counter such misleading responses of North Korea, Japan will continue to strongly request the following to bring closure to abduction issues; 1) a homecoming for all victims who are still alive, 2) uncovering the truth on fate of abductees, and 3) the handover of the remains of those victims no longer living. The Japanese government will continue to make firm efforts to receive a sincere response from North Korea through our basic policy of "dialogue and pressure".

While the Japanese government has done what it can to solve both the North Korean refugee issue and abduction issue, due to its multilateral nature, there is a limited role that one country can play to comprehensively solve the North Korean Human Rights issues. Therefore, what is required is alliance and cooperation with international community members.

Along these lines, last year Japan headed diplomatic efforts as a co-sponsor, along with EU countries, of the UN General Assembly's resolution on the "Human Rights Situation of North Korea."

Domestically, the LDP set up a team to promote international cooperation on North Korean issue. The team will examine ways to create international collaboration with 1) countries broadly interested in human rights; 2) countries especially interested in the improvement of conditions for North Korean refugees; 3) governments that have diplomatic relations with North Korea, and 4) NPOs/NGOs, political parties, and individual councilors of the type of countries previously

mentioned. The team is working to improve the human rights condition of North Koreans and to realize a complete solution of the abduction issues.

In closing, I want to reassure today's participants that the Japanese government will continue raising awareness to improve human rights conditions in North Korea. In particular, we see great value in participating in meetings such as the IPCNKR that can serve as a turning point and a means by which Councilor exchanges deepen international cooperation. We deeply appreciate your understanding and commitment as this process gains legitimacy.

Thank you very much.