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Japan and North Korea: Governments should be open on issue of forcible abductions

As the Japanese and North Korean Governments meet to arrange home visits for Japanese women married to North Koreans, Amnesty International called on both governments not to forget another important humanitarian issue -- that of Japanese nationals who disappeared in past decades and are widely believed to have been forcibly abducted to North Korea.

“The Governments of Japan, North Korea as well as South Korea should make public all available information about claims that at least 10 Japanese nationals were abducted and taken to North Korea over the last 20 years,” Amnesty International said today.

“These governments may be withholding vital information which should now be revealed for the sake of the alleged victims and their families.”

During the 1970s and 1980s at least 10 Japanese nationals, including a 13-year-old girl, are believed to have been abducted by North Korean agents and taken to North Korea. No concrete evidence to support these claims has been made public, and some of the information about this comes from South Korean counter-espionage sources, which are often biased. North Korea has denied the claims.

For many years relations between North Korea and Japan have been soured by the alleged abductions and denial of visits by Japanese wives. Hundreds of Japanese women married North Korean men and moved to North Korea between 1959 and 1982 and have been prevented by the government from returning to visit their families in Japan. Following an agreement between the two governments in August, the first visits by Japanese wives are expected in late September.

Amnesty International does not have access to impartial information about the alleged abductions and because of North Korean Government restrictions, it has not been permitted to conduct independent research inside North Korea.

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