

13th Session of EMRIP/Pacific and Asia Virtual Regional Meeting

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Hokkaido Ainu

KIMURA Fumio, on behalf of Citizens' Group for Ancestral Remains of Biratori, Monbetsu Ainu Association, Alliance for the Achievement of Ainu (=Human Beings) Rights, Citizens' Alliance for The Examination of Ainu Policy, Sapporo Freedom School 'YU'

Irankarapte. I am KIMURA Fumio. I was born and raised in Biratori, in the Saru River drainage, in Ainu Mosir (Hokkaido). Thank you for giving me the floor today.

In recent years, Hokkaido has become increasingly dependent on the tourism industry. As a result of the prolonged restrictions against COVID-19, Ainu people engaged in small-scale Ainu tourism-related businesses have suffered severe setbacks economically. What's more, despite now being a critical juncture in terms of Ainu rights, debate from both within and out the Ainu community on crucial Ainu issues has come to a near halt.

Now, 150 years ago, Japanese from the south stripped us Ainu of our land, human rights, dignity, culture, and language. The Yamato-Japanese forcibly dislocated us from our lands, or forced our people to assimilate to Japanese language and culture. I can never forgive this injustice.

The Japanese government finally recognized the Ainu as an Indigenous people in 2008, only after the adoption of the UNDRIP. However, recent Ainu Policy Promotion legislation provides guarantee for not even a single one of the Indigenous rights stipulated in the UNDRIP. Meanwhile, discrimination against the Ainu people by Yamato Japanese has not lessened; rather, in the cyber realm it has become all the more virulent.

One of the greatest violations against humanity occurs in regard to the problem of Ainu ancestral remains, with which I am engaged as an activist. For almost a century from the 1880s, Japanese researchers desecrated Ainu graves and removed the human remains of nearly 2000 Ainu individuals. The Japanese government has repatriated a limited number of them. However, the benefits of the repatriation are limited because most of these repatriations occurred as a result of litigation, and the governmental guidelines place the brunt of the burden for the application process upon the descendants. The universities involved have not offered a word of apology neither toward these ancestors nor our community. I ask you, who is the perpetrator here and who the victim? Even though we have achieved some repatriation, my anger continues unabated.

What's more, the remains which have not yet been repatriated have been gathered in a 'memorial facility' constructed in the Upopoy in Shiraoi. The Japanese government says

that they are going to conduct “dignified memorial services” there, but influential scientists have declared that they ‘wish to have access to the remains in the facility for research purposes.’ They and the Japanese government are blatantly ignoring the provisions of Article 12 of the UNDRIP. Almost no Ainu accept this government policy cordially.

Last year, a further incident occurred when the Hokkaido government made criminal charges of “poaching” against three of the members of the Monbetsu Ainu Association for harvesting salmon for their traditional fishing ceremony. Ultimately, six months later it was decided that the case would not be taken to court, but the Ainu elder HATAKEYAMA Satoshi, who as a result of the charges underwent numerous investigations, suffered a stroke in February and is now in the hospital. If he had been well, Hatakeyama Ekasi would have been together at my side delivering testimony today.

Earlier this summer, the Raporo Ainu Nation from the southeast part of the island resorted to litigation to demand their collective fishing right to harvest riverine salmon be acknowledged.

This is a blockage of our historical rights that Japan is attempting to continue. I sincerely hope that my statement on the Japanese government’s serious violations of human rights will make a contribution to the advancement of Indigenous rights being promoted through the United Nations. *Iyayraykere.*