

U.S. pushes on child 'abductions'

Kyodo News

A senior U.S. government official has warned Japan that its failure to join an international treaty on child custody may have adverse effects on Washington's assistance in resolving North Korean abductions of Japanese nationals, diplomatic sources said Saturday.

Kurt Campbell, U.S. assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, made the remarks to senior Foreign Ministry officials during his visit in early February and strongly urged the government to become a party to the treaty, the sources said.

The Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction is aimed at preventing one of the parents in a failed international marriage from taking their child across national borders against an existing child custody arrangement.

The U.S. government has urged Japan to join the treaty due to an increasing incidence of Japanese parents "abducting" their children to Japan even though their spouses of different nationalities have custody over the children in the United States.

According to the sources, Campbell told officials that taking children from those who have custody over them is considered "abduction" by Washington and criticism against Japan over such cases is increasing in the U.S.

He noted that there were similarities in the sadness felt by Japanese people whose children were abducted by North Korea and by Americans whose children were taken away by their Japanese spouses, the sources said.

While reaffirming that the U.S. administration and Congress have made clear their positions on seeking a resolution of North Korea's abductions, Campbell expressed hope that the government would give consideration to the child custody issue so as not to damage this willingness to support Japan.

Japan has been largely reluctant to do so, with a senior Foreign Ministry official saying, "It does not suit Japanese culture to treat parents, who have brought back their children to the country, as criminals."

But the government has begun considering the possibility of becoming a party to the treaty in response to the prompting of other countries.

Late last month, Campbell met in Washington with about 30 people seeking to see their children who have apparently been "abducted" by their Japanese spouses. He had promised them that he would express his concerns over the situation to the Japanese government.

The issue drew attention last year when a man from the United States was arrested in Japan after trying to take his children back from his divorced Japanese wife, who allegedly took the children to Japan against a U.S. court decision.

The Japan Times: Sunday, Feb. 7, 2010
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