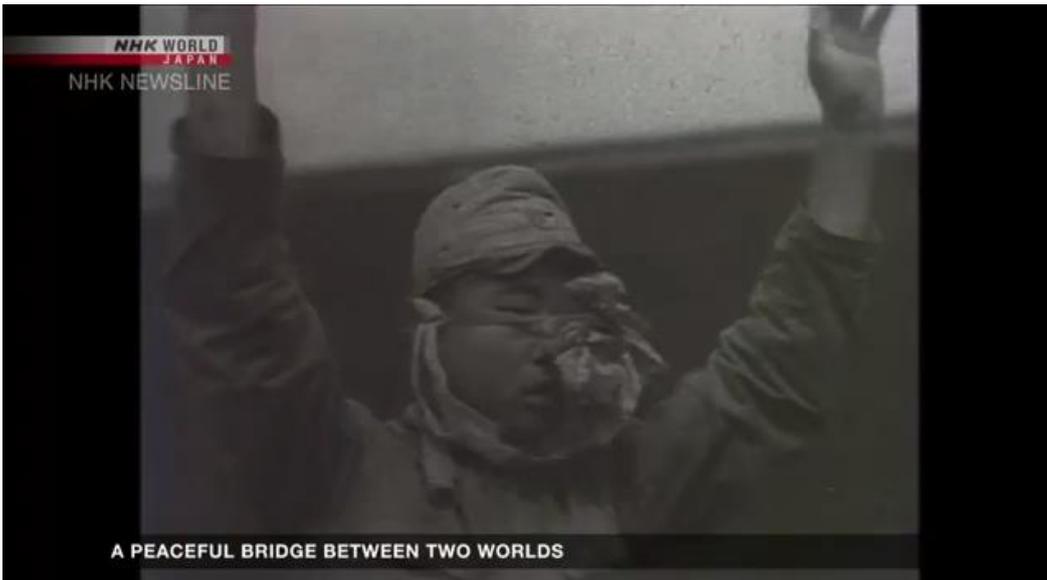


A Peaceful Bridge Between Two Worlds



<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/videos/20220921102106935/>

77 years ago, the former Soviet Union invaded the four northern islands of Japan. More than 7,000 residents were forced to leave. Since then, Russia has controlled the islands, while Japan claims them. Now one high school student is trying to create a peaceful bridge between the two nations. NHK World's Yoshikawa Yuichi reports.

Kondo Himeka is a high school student in Nemuro city in Hokkaido. She is recording the experiences of her great grandmother Nishidate Tomie, a former resident of Kunashiri, one of four islands in the northern territories. At the end of World War II, the former Soviet army invaded the islands despite a treaty between the two nations. About 7,400 residents of Kunashiri were forced to flee with many settling in Nemuro city.

We thought that if the army came, they would kill us, so we talked about how we'd have no choice but to go into a bomb shelter to die.

What happened to them, being chased out without having any time to prepare physically or emotionally, would be unthinkable today.

After hearing her great grandmother's story, Kondo had an idea. She decided to deepen cultural exchange between the two countries by creating a bridge between Nemuro city and Kunashiri island.

For both Japanese and Russians, it's their home. A place where each belong. If the two countries become friends and people live there together, no one will feel bad.

She started sharing her great grandmother's story with other school children. She also participated in a

national speech contest in order to raise awareness of issues relating to the islands. When Russia invaded Ukraine in February, she briefly wavered in her desire to create a peaceful connection between the two countries. She was not without her concerns as she confided to her sister.

I can't help but wonder, what would happen if we ended up like Ukraine?

But she knew her goal was worth pursuing. She went on to join a high school club that studies the northern territories. On this day, they met another former islander who shared his experiences.

Do you have a message to convey to the next generation?

Even if the world changes drastically, the fact is that Russia is our neighbor. As the saying goes, make good friends with your neighbors. It is better to get along even if we are talking about foreign countries. It will probably take some time, but I want young people to create a friendly era.

As a 4th generation of a resident who fled the islands, I would like to tell the world about the northern territories. I understand that I need to study a lot myself in order to foster more peaceful relations.

In the current global climate, this schoolgirl's dream of connecting these two worlds, has perhaps never been more important, and she is determined to bring it to life.

Source: (NHK World News)

Now discuss the questions with a partner.

1. What is your opinion of the northern territories issue? What information do you know about the issue?
2. Do you think it is possible for Russians and Japanese to live in harmony on the islands? What problems might occur?
3. Can you think of any peaceful solution for the issue?
4. How do you feel about Kondo Himeka refusing to give up her pursuit even after the Russian invasion of Ukraine?
5. Do you agree that it is important to get along with your neighbors? Should Japan keep a friendly relationship with Russia? Does Japan have bad relationships with other neighbors?