

I lied at the ministry of foreign affairs.

This past August, I interned at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tokyo. During my internship there, I had the opportunity to learn about various aspects of diplomacy, including the Japanese government's stance on the Okinawa base issue, as well as diplomatic relations with Southwestern Asia countries, in the department where I was assigned. On my first day of the internship, I found that I was the only one from Okinawa, and I couldn't help but felt anxious about potential differences in academic abilities, and the fact that I was from Okinawa. But both my fellow interns and the diplomats were kind, and I never felt excluded during our work together. However, during the second week of the internship, I experienced a moment when I realized the difference between us.

It happened during a lunch conversation when we discussed our plans for the remaining one month of our summer vacation. Half of my fellow interns were planning to study abroad, while the other half mentioned getting together to research and discuss various books in their university. To me, it seemed that they had lofty goals. When it was my turn, I lied. I said that I was preparing for my next year's teaching internship. I lied because I didn't want them to think, "Okinawa is indeed impoverished." I lied because I wanted them to think that I was going to do something more important than return to Okinawa and my part-time job.

In reality, I had taken time off from my part-time job to intern for those two weeks and, in September, I worked full-time, five days a week, to cover my tuition and living expenses. Also, I know that some of my friends often work harder than I,

and some struggle to pay for their education. In Okinawa, I'm not a minority, but among my internship peers, I was, and that made me feel self-conscious and inferior. That was why I lied. What bothered me the most was feeling like I was falling short compared to students from other prefectures.

In this speech, I don't want to convey that my environment is miserable and that everyone is poor. But I want you to understand that students who give up on pursuing higher education due to economic reasons exist, and I hope we can extend a helping to them. I especially ask those who have opportunities to interact with high school students hoping for college to inform them about scholarships and financial support. High school students aspiring for college face significant financial burdens, and those aiming for prestigious schools often invest in supplementary education programs. It's challenging

for them to perform well.

Personally, I didn't have much financial support for my university education, but I was fortunate to receive a scholarship from Naha City, which helped me attend college. Still, I know that not everyone is as fortunate, and some students were denied the opportunity because I received a grant that was not available for everyone. Bridging the gap in financial resources for students is difficult. Going to college is expensive, but the process of reaching that point is costly as well. Please support students, even if they come from challenging financial backgrounds. With your help, they can focus on their studies. I don't want to live in a society where access to education is determined by economic disparities.

Honestly, as I see people who are suffering because of war, I hesitated to speak about my hopes and dreams. However, this morning I realized I can

speak out and advocate for students who have had to give up on their dreams due to economic constraints. Regardless of our backgrounds, circumstances, or surroundings, we all share a desire for peace and the right to pursue our dreams.

Lastly, I mentioned the lie I told during my internship at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This lie was not just about feeling inferior to students from other prefectures but also about not wanting to be perceived as the representation of Okinawa's students' living standards. Okinawa is by no means inferior to other prefectures. It is a wonderful and appealing place. That's why I don't want Okinawan students to give up on their dreams due to economic disparities. I would be happy if this speech could become a reminder of the privilege of being able to attend college for the students at my school. Thank you!