

“A Miracle”

Hello, everyone. My name is Stephan Emi Nakamashi.

Today, I would like to talk about how grateful we are to be here.

This might seem a bit of a strange topic so let me ask you a question.

“What is your dream? What do you want to be?”

One day, in a place which is closer to Okinawa than Tokyo, a man asked a girl the same question. I was really surprised at what she said because she replied, “I want to live until I become an adult.” Not the kind of answer you would have expected a little girl to give.

Where she lives is a pile of garbage surrounding a slum in Manila, in the Philippines – it is called smokey mountain. It is always full of smoke all day due to fires in the dump. There are a lot of children who survive there by collecting scrap metal and cans from piles of garbage. They work for 10 hours starting at 5 a.m., and they only get about 50 yen a day. That is how they manage to survive. They work amid deadly poisons such as methane gas, butane gas, and dioxins. In this kind of place, not only are there many hazards, but also the children live without basic sanitation and adequate nutrition, so if one of them does make it to adulthood, then it is a major achievement.

Let me tell you one more story, this time from Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia. The economy there has been devastated by the collapse of socialism.

There is no social security, the number of unemployed people in the town increased. If we lost our jobs, the government would help us financially in Japan. However, this is not in case in Mongolia. If they lost their job, they would have no income at all. And poverty has led some parents to abuse or abandon their children. Now, many children are homeless and

live in manholes. Ulaanbaatar is one of the hardest places to live in the world, with temperatures often reaching -30 degrees Celsius in winter. And homeless children have nowhere to live except in manholes that cover the pipes that carry hot water for heating. And the inside of the manhole was not an environment for humans to live in, and the conditions were terrible, with a horrific odor, sewage pooling, trash scattered everywhere, and rats and cockroaches crawling around. Children were living in such darkness. So, lots of children fall ill after being bitten by rats. Among them was a 14-year-old girl who died after she gave birth surrounded by rats. The fact she was pregnant in the first place was the result of sexual violence. Even in such dire circumstances, these children are desperately trying to live.

But, how about us? Do we cherish each day as it comes?

They work so hard to live. Even if they are abandoned by their parents or have nothing to eat, they desperately try to survive. On the contrary, so many people in Japan or in developed country live for work with no purpose. It is like a zombie living. Even children in the Philippines and Mongolia have purpose. They want to live! They taught us how amazing it is that we can live. However, in developed countries, we forgot to be thankful for the small things. Sometimes, we complain about the dinner our mother has made for us. Sometimes we complain about our surroundings. But remember, we have a beautiful family, good friends, a house where we can live comfortably, and we have something to eat and drink. It is a miracle that we can live safely and in good health. So, let us cherish each day and live our lives with gratitude! Thank you.