

The Four Northern Islands after WWII

Post-WWII: Negotiations and cooperation over the Four Northern Islands

The Four Northern Territories issue is yet to be resolved even after about 80 years have passed since the end of World War II, and the Government of Japan has engaged firmly in the negotiations under the policy of concluding a peace treaty through the resolution of the territorial issue.

However, in March 2022, the Government of Russia, considering the measures taken by Japan in relation to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, announced measures such as discontinuing negotiations on a peace treaty, suspending free visits and the Four-Island exchange program, and withdrawing from the dialogue on joint economic activities on the Four Northern Islands.

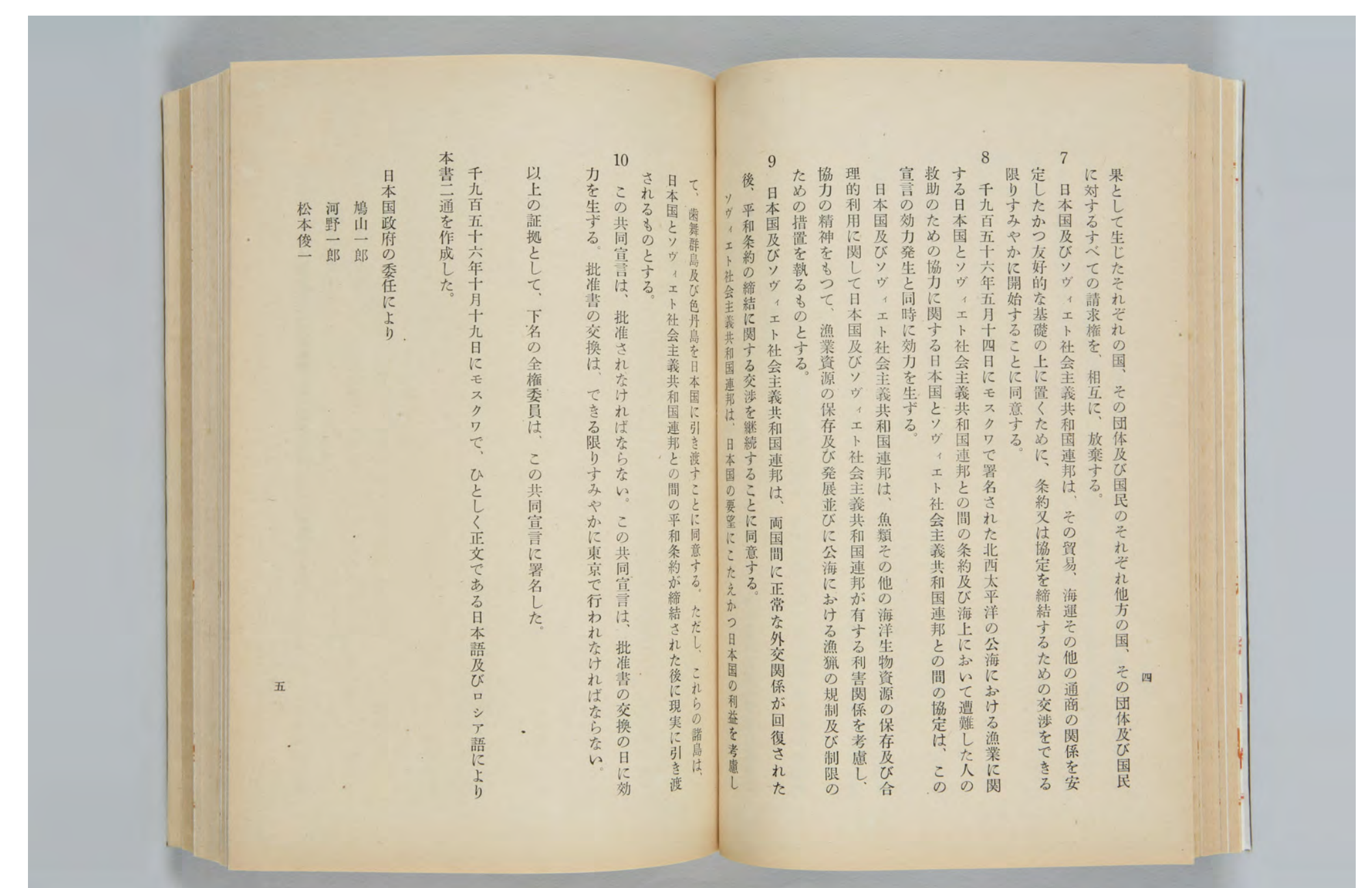
As the current situation is entirely the result of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, Russia's attempt to shift responsibility to Japan is extremely unjust and absolutely unacceptable, and the Government of Japan has lodged a strong protest against the Russian side.

Although Japan-Russia relations are in a difficult situation due to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the Government of Japan will firmly maintain its policy of concluding a peace treaty through the resolution of the territorial issue.

Negotiations for a peace treaty between Japan and the Soviet Union

In the Japan-Soviet Joint Declaration of October 1956, the two countries agreed to continue negotiations on the conclusion of a peace treaty and that the Soviet Union would hand over the Habomai and Shikotan Islands to Japan after the conclusion of a peace treaty. In the Japan-Soviet Joint Declaration of April 1991, it was made clear for the first time in writing that the four islands of Habomai, Shikotan, Kunashiri, and Etorofu were the subject of the territorial issue that should be solved by a peace treaty. In addition, in the Tokyo Declaration of October 1993, the territorial issue was defined as an issue of the attribution of the Four Northern Islands, with the names of the islands listed, and it was agreed that the peace treaty would be concluded at an early date by resolving this issue based on the historical and legal facts, the documents to which both parties had agreed, as well as the principles of law and justice.

During Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to Russia in April 2013, he and Russian President Vladimir Putin shared the recognition that the absence of a peace treaty between Japan and Russia 67 years after the end of World War II is an unnatural state of affairs. Negotiations have continued since then.



Original signatures on the occasion of the promulgation of the Joint Declaration by Japan and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
Collection: National Archives of Japan



Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa signs the "Tokyo Declaration" with President Yeltsin
Photo: CABINET PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

Development of Japan-Russia cooperation concerning the Four Northern Islands

The Government of Japan has implemented the following cooperation and exchange programs in the Four Northern Islands to help create conditions for progress in the peace treaty negotiations, including the resolution of the Northern Territories issue.

These programs have not been conducted recently due to the deterioration of Japan-Russia relations following Russia's aggression against Ukraine. The resumption of exchange and other programs involving the Four Northern Islands, including visits to the graves in the Four Northern Islands, is one of Japan's highest priorities in Japan-Russia relations.

Four-Island Exchange Program, Free Visits and Visits to Graves

(1) Four-Island Exchange Program

Under this program, until the resolution of the Northern Territories issue, Japanese citizens and Russian residents in the Four Northern Islands are able to engage in mutual visits without passports or visas. The aim of this program is to promote mutual understanding between them and contribute to the settlement of the territorial issue.

(2) Free Visits

From a humanitarian perspective, arrangements for visits to the Northern Territories by Japanese citizens who are former residents of the Islands and their families are made as simple as possible.

(3) Visits to Gravesite

From a humanitarian perspective, Japanese citizens visit their family graves on the Islands only with an identification card.

Assistance for residents of the Four Northern Islands

- (1) Accepting patients from the Four Northern Islands
- (2) Training for doctors, nurses and others from the Four Northern Islands

Cooperation in the neighboring areas between Japan and Russia, including the Four Northern Islands

- (1) Cooperation in disaster prevention
- (2) Cooperation in ecosystem conservation



"Accessory Hand Making (on Kunashiri Island)" in the Four-Island exchange program
Photo: Northern Territories Issues Association

There have been negotiations and cooperation with the Soviet Union and then Russia over the Northern Territories since the end of WWII ! Although relations between Japan and Russia are currently in a difficult situation, the policy of concluding a peace treaty through the resolution of the territorial issue has not changed !

