

The Four Northern Islands consisting of Etorofu Island, Kunashiri Island, Shikotan Island, and the Habomai Islands are an inherent part of the territory of Japan.

Situated off the northeastern coast of Hokkaido's main Island, these four islands have remained occupied by Russia up until the present day, without any legal grounds.





Etorofu Island

What is the Northern Territories Issue?

In 1855, Japan and Russia signed the Treaty of Commerce, Navigation and Delimitation between Japan and Russia (the Shimoda Treaty) which confirmed the border between the two countries as had been naturally formed between Etorofu Island and Uruppu Island to the north. Since that time, the Four Northern Islands have been an inherent part of Japan's territory that have never been a territory of any other country, even in the context of bilateral international agreements. However, in 1945, the Soviet Union (USSR) opened the war against Japan, ignoring the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact then in effect. After Japan accepted the Potsdam Declaration and clearly stated its intention to surrender, the USSR occupied all Four Northern Islands and forcibly deported Japanese residents from the islands. Russia's occupation has continued to date without any legal ground, and the Japanese people strongly demand the return of the Four Northern Islands. This is the Northern Territories Issue.

The Northern Territories in International Treaties

The Nineteenth Century

The Shimoda Treaty (1855)

Japan and Russia confirmed a naturally established border at that time between the islands of Etorofu and Uruppu. Etorofu, Kunashiri, Shikotan, and the Habomai Islands were affirmed as Japanese territory, while the Kurile Islands from Uruppu northward as Russian.

Treaty for the Exchange of Sakhalin for the Kurile Islands (1875)

Japan acquired the Kurile Islands in exchange for the cession of the entire Island of Karafuto (Sakhalin) to Russia. In this Treaty, the Kurile Islands ceded by Russia (the eighteen islands north of Uruppu) are individually named, while Etorofu, Kunashiri, Shikotan, and the Habomai Islands were not included in the Kuril Islands.

History of the Northern Territories Issue



The Shimoda Treaty (1855)



Treaty for the Exchange of Sakhalin for the Kurile Islands (1875)

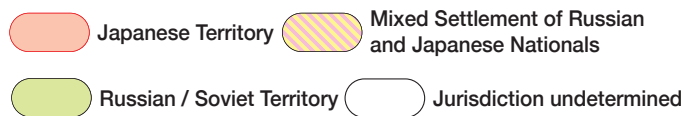
The Twentieth Century

Portsmouth Peace Treaty (1905)

As a result of this Treaty, which was signed to end the war between Japan and Russia, the part of the Karafuto (Sakhalin) Island that lies south of the 50th parallel north was ceded from Russia to Japan.

San Francisco Peace Treaty (1951)

Under this Treaty, Japan renounced all right, title, and claim to the Kurile Islands and the southern part of Sakhalin. However, the treaty does not specify to whom these islands belong. In light of a series of the treaties concluded between Japan and Russia in the past, “the Kurile Islands” renounced by Japan under this Treaty does not include the Four Northern Islands. In addition, the Soviet Union did not sign this treaty.



Portsmouth Peace Treaty (1905)



San Francisco Peace Treaty (1951)

Life Experiences of Former Japanese Residents of the Northern Territories (former islanders)

At the end of the Second World War, 17,291 Japanese nationals lived in 3,124 households in the Northern Territories of Etorofu, Kunashiri, Shikotan, and the Habomai Islands. About half of these islanders fled their native home, eluding the strict monitoring of Soviet troops.

Those who stayed on the island were deported by the Soviet Union between 1947 and 1948.

At present, no Japanese Nationals live in the Northern Territories, which is a part of Japanese territory.



Islanders attempting to flee by fishing boat.



Islanders being deported

Photo credit (lower): League of Residents of Chishima and Habomai Islands



TOKUNO Hiroshi,
a former resident
of Shikotan

After the end of the war, we heard from our school principal that “Soviet troops will come to the school,” and then during math class, Soviet troops armed with guns marched into the classroom without even taking off their boots.

I was terrified. It wasn't long before Soviet soldiers even went into people's houses, taking away whatever they wanted.

Later, the families of the Soviet servicemen also began coming to the island, as they occupied houses, we took up residence in storehouse and stables. In 1947,

the deportation order came, and we were detained in relocation camps in Maoka in Karafuto (now Kholmsk in Sakhalin). Life in the camps was miserable, and many of us ended up dying of malnutrition.

Diplomatic Negotiations between Japan and the Soviet Union/Russia

The Government of Japan has been persistently engaged in diplomatic negotiations with the Soviet Union and Russia, seeking a resolution of the Northern Territories Issue based on the consistent and basic policy of concluding a peace treaty with Russia through the resolution of the issue of the attribution of the Four Northern Islands, which are an inherent part of the territory of Japan. In recent years, as a result of cooperation between Japan and Russia, initiatives have been carried out in order to realize joint economic activities in the Four Northern Islands, and former island residents have visited the graves of their ancestors in the Four Northern Islands by airplane.



Japan-Soviet Joint Declaration (1956)



Irkutsk Statement (2001)



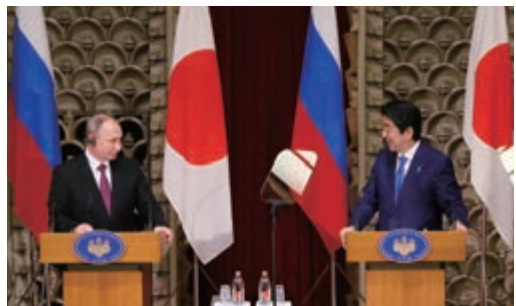
Japanese-Soviet Joint Communiqué (1991)



Japan-Russia Action Plan (2003)



Tokyo Declaration (1993)



Statement for the press (2016)

Photo Credit: Photo of the Japan-Soviet Joint Declaration courtesy of Kyodo News; others from the Cabinet Public Relations Office.

Efforts by the Japanese People toward achieving the Return of the Northern territories

Campaigns for the Return of the Northern Territories

In order to strongly support diplomatic negotiations by the Japanese government with the Russian government to find a resolution of the Northern Territories Issue, campaigns involving both the private and public sectors demanding the return of the Four Northern Islands are being actively carried out across Japan.



Central appeal action in support of the return of the Northern Territories

Photo credit: Nemuro City



Nationwide Northern Territories Awareness-Raising Event

Four-Island Exchange Program

As part of efforts to improve the atmosphere for the resolution of the Northern Territories Issue, the four-island exchange program has been carried out in the form of mutual visits without passports or visas in order to promote mutual understanding between the Japanese people and the residents of the Four Northern Islands.



Visit by Japanese citizens (Shikotan cosplay exchange)



Visit by residents of the four Northern Islands (exchange of opinions with local residents in Akita Prefecture)

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