

Abductee Soga Reunited with Her Family

REPATRIATED Japanese abductee Soga Hitomi was reunited with her ailing American husband, Charles Robert Jenkins, and their two daughters in Jakarta, Indonesia, on July 9 for the first time since Soga returned to Japan from North Korea 21 months earlier.

Soga, who had arrived in Jakarta the day before, greeted Jenkins and daughters Mika and Belinda at the airport as they flew in from Pyongyang aboard a Japanese government-chartered plane and climbed down the ramp. Soga, 45, hugged and kissed 64-year-old Jenkins, and the first words she uttered were apologies in Japanese. She then hugged Mika, 21, and Belinda, 18, for five minutes after offering apologies in Korean. Belinda was heard saying “Mom!” in Korean.

The couple and their daughters stayed at a hotel in Jakarta for 10 days to talk about their future, which is clouded by the U.S. threat to court-martial Jenkins, an accused military deserter, once he is taken into custody. The family, facing his deteriorating health, came to Japan for his medical treatment on July 18 after the U.S. government indicated that it will not seek his handover while he remains in hospital. Jenkins, who

defected to North Korea in 1965, initially refused to go to Japan for fear of extradition to the United States under a bilateral treaty. Indonesia has no such extradition treaty with the United States. The Japanese government is negotiating with Washington on how to deal with the Jenkins issue in order to ensure that the family will live permanently in Japan.

Soga, abducted to North Korea in 1978, returned to Japan in October 2002 together with four other Japanese, Hasuike Kaoru, Hasuike Yukiko, Chimura Yasushi and Chimura Fokie, leaving behind Jenkins, whom she married in North Korea, and their two daughters. Their return was arranged during Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro’s visit to Pyongyang for a meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Il in May.

Koizumi’s second visit led to the return of five children of the Hasuikes and the Chimuras, but Jenkins and his daughters refused to come to Japan.

When Soga met U.S. Ambassador to Japan Howard H. Baker in May 2003, she presented a document asking the U.S. government not to indict Jenkins for desertion. “I had a fateful encounter with my hus-

band,” she wrote in the document. “Both of us had experienced the vicissitudes of life but they have become things of the past.”

U.S. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher told a July 9 press conference that the U.S. government was glad Jenkins and his daughters were reunited with Soga because Washington regarded the reunion as a humanitarian matter. But he emphasized that Jenkins would potentially face “serious charges.” His remark indicated that there has been no change in the U.S. position and that Washington would seek his handover for a court-martial.

Since the Jakarta reunion took place two days before the House of Councillors election in Japan, the Tokyo government was criticized for having tried to take advantage of the occasion for election purposes. Koizumi reportedly wishes to resume negotiations at an early date with North Korea on the normalization of diplomatic relations, but there is a strong body of public opinion that the government should immediately urge North Korea to investigate the fate of other Japanese nationals who are believed to have been abducted to North Korea and are still unaccounted for.