

This year is the 70th anniversary of World War II coming to an end. On newspapers and television, we constantly hear about this war so, we won't forget about it. However, there is another thing we must not forget. Today, I'm going to talk about something which is even more important than war because it affects everyone.

In May this year, my class went to Kumamoto for our school trip. We visited an area that was affected by poor industrial management, Minamata city. This trip opened my eyes to the problems we face due to environmental damage caused by industry. One of them is Minamata Disease. Minamata Disease was caused by an organic mercury compound released in waste water by a local company. Some fell down easily, some had trouble speaking and some got cramps in their hands. At first, the cause was unknown. Unfortunately, even after the cause was found, the company did not stop disposing of the contaminated water for more than ten years. This action made the tragedy much worse. About 3,000 people were affected, and many of them died, including innocent babies.

When we went to Minamata, we visited the Minamata Disease Museum. In the museum, we saw a lot of photos and displays about the disease, which told us about its terribleness. Since the cause of the disease was unknown at first, the disease was thought a rare disease. Therefore, patients and their families were not only tortured by the disease, but they were damaged and humiliated by being discriminated over many many years.

Is Minamata Disease just a sad historical event? No! After more than half a century, hundreds of people are still suffering from the disease. Minamata gives us a lot of lessons we must learn from.

First, once the environment is destroyed, human beings cannot live a prosperous life. Environmental destruction progresses silently and steadily, until suddenly, it strikes us after years. In many cases, when we notice the destruction, it is too late. Second, when we develop our world, we have to give people's wellbeing the highest priority. Victims of Minamata Disease are suffering because one company, who selfishly pursued profit above all else, destroyed the environment, and in return, the environment deprived people of their health and their right to live happily. I had a chance to listen to some victims who acquired the disease when they were unborn babies. One of them said, "If we had not had the disease, we could have lived happily and peacefully with our families."

Then, what should we do in order not to repeat such a sad problem? We have to learn about the errors made in history and pass on these lessons to later generations. People in Minamata are now speaking out to the world. We must visit Minamata to listen to victims in person. They are waiting for us. This is the best way to understand the importance of health and environment. Jose Mujica, the former President of Uruguay said, "Development cannot go against happiness. When we fight for the environment, we must remember that the essential element of the environment is called human happiness." This is what we must remember.