

Tohoku students to talk of quake at Summer Davos

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Seven high school and university students from the Tohoku region, including some who lost their parents in the March 11 disasters, will share their experiences with world leaders at the Annual Meeting of the New Champions, organizer said.

The three-day meeting, also known as the Summer Davos, starting Wednesday in Dalian, China, is expected to draw some 1,500 leaders from different fields.

The four high school students and three university students from Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures will speak about the disaster to deepen public understanding about the situation in the Tohoku region.

"People can watch images of the devastated area on TV news. But at the Summer Davos, I want to tell (people around the world) about disaster victims' feelings and what I actually saw and experienced," Sayaka Sugawara, a first-year student at Sendai Ikuei Gakuen High School in Miyagi Prefecture, told a news conference in Tokyo on Monday.

Sugawara lost her mother and grandmother in the tsunami. When the monstrous waves swallowed up the family home in Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, Sugawara was there with her family, preparing to escape.

But it was too late, Sugawara said. She was swept away with her mother and grandmother.

After being carried along by the raging waters, she saw her mother, who was trapped un-

der debris with a broken leg and nails and pieces of wood sticking into her body, she said.

"I did my best to save her, but the wreckage was too heavy to remove only by myself," Sugawara said. "I wanted to rescue her, but (I knew) if I stayed there I would die too. ... And I chose to live."

Telling her mother that she loved her, Sugawara was able to make her way to an elementary school in the neighborhood and spent a night there.

The past few months have been very tough, Sugawara said, saying she has sometimes wanted to kill herself. But she is now ready to speak about her devastating experiences on behalf of the thousands of disaster victims.

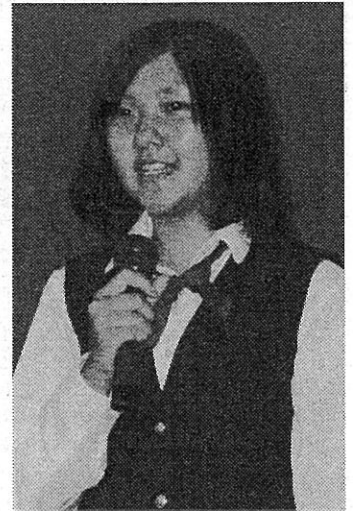
"People may see me as a poor high school kid, but I don't think so," Sugawara said. "I've lost so

many things because of the disaster. ... (but) there were opportunities that I've gained because of the experience. And (now) I can understand the feeling of people who carry similar pain."

Eisuke Kato, a third-year student at Toryo High School in Miyagi, said he wants to talk about the current situation in Tohoku, where many people are still struggling to rebuild their lives.

"I want to throw many questions to the world's top leaders at the Summer Davos. And I want to make use of their opinions in my future life," said Kato, who lost his home in Kesennuma, a fishing community in Miyagi Prefecture, to the tsunami.

During their three-day stay in China, the students also plan to meet with young Chinese who were orphaned by the Great Si-



Sayaka Sugawara

chuan Earthquake, which struck the southwest Chinese province in 2008.

The special program for the Tohoku students was organized by the Tokyo-based Global Fund for Education Assistance.