

U.S. resolution condemns Japan

Lawmakers press for action on child abductions

By ERIC JOHNSTON

Staff writer

OSAKA — U.S. lawmakers introduced a resolution in the House of Representatives Wednesday that condemns Japan for being an international haven for child abductors.

Sponsored by Rep. Jim Moran, a Democrat from Virginia, and Rep. Chris Smith, a Republican from New Jersey, the resolution calls on the American government to emphasize to Japan that it is a major bilateral issue that must be resolved by joining the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction.



Spousal abduction: Fathers of American children abducted to Japan hold photos of their children Wednesday on Capitol Hill. From left are Randy Collins, William Lake, Michael Elias, Ken Connelly and Douglas Berg. AP PHOTO

"The House condemns the abduction and retention of all minor children being held in Japan away from the United States parents in violation of their human rights and United States and international law. It calls on the government of Japan to immediately facilitate the resolution of all abduction cases, to recognize U.S. court orders governing persons subject to jurisdiction in a U.S. court, and to make immediately possible access and communication for all children for their left-behind parents," the resolution reads.

The resolution, introduced on Children's Day in Japan, still needs approval by Congress. It aims to pressure Japan to account for children being held by a Japanese national against the wishes of an American parent.

Smith warned of possible sanctions against Japan.

In a telephone interview with The Japan Times Thursday morning, Paul Toland, a U.S. Navy commander now living in Maryland whose daughter Erika was taken from their home at a U.S. naval housing facility in Yokohama in 2003 by her now deceased mother, said the resolution shows that Congress is getting behind the issue, although he criticized the State Department for not doing enough to push the issue.

"We're now fighting the apathy of the Japanese government and the U.S. State Department," Toland said.

Christopher Savoie, who was arrested last September in Fukuoka when he tried to reclaim his two children who had been taken there by his ex-wife, said that the real enemy is the Japanese family court system.

Savoie, along with Toland and other parents with abducted children in Japan and their supporters, attended a Capitol Hill rally with Moran and Smith and a candlelight vigil Wednesday in front of the Japanese ambassador's residence.

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