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## Stop International Child Abduction

 By Bruce Mason, Gabriola Sounder  
 Monday, May 1 2006

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International marriages in Japan have become commonplace. Newspaper reports estimate that the figure is now, one in 20. But, despite that trend, the Japanese have not responded with adequate mechanisms for dealing with cross-border divorces and custody issues. As a result, it has become a safe haven for child abduction.

It is also estimated that every year about 400 Canadian born children are abducted by foreign-born parents.

"In non-Hague countries getting children returned is almost impossible, and Japan is one of the worst," said Marie Eddie-Callagain, a US family lawyer who practices in Japan. The US Embassy in Japan is aware of at least 20 such cases and that the numbers are skyrocketing.

From a western perspective, the Japanese system is, in a word, inscrutable, or worse.

Despite Murray Wood's Canadian custody order, the Saitama Family Court awarded custody to the abductor-mother, Ayako Wood, first on a temporary, then permanent basis.

A statement made under duress by her 11 year-old son that he wished to stay, held sway over Canadian courts.

That decision results in the failure of attempts to file for habeas corpus in the Japanese High Court, because Wood no longer has custody and has no legal standing in that country. And in Japanese law, there is no provision for joint custody.

As the dispute becomes more fierce, the trend in Japan is to keep left-behind dads away from children as disruptive forces.

In the meantime, psychologists warn that the children in question face particular emotional stress due to the deeply rooted Japanese beliefs.

"The Japanese parent often won't talk about the other parent at all - or even about the other country (in this case, Canada)," explained US clinical psychologist Jim McRae. "This has grave consequences for the child's identity."

In an address to the UN Convention on Child Rights in Special Session, Nancy Faulkner, PhD, said: "Parental abduction is child abuse. The resultant trauma to a child, who in a moment was stolen away from his entire world of familiarity, is emotionally, developmentally and psychologically devastating."

There are no grey areas here. The case is cut and dried. Ayako Wood, a non-custodial mother, has repeatedly lied in and out of court and kidnapped two Canadian children.



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What Murray Wood wants is to re-establish contact with his kids, to know that he is still here, and for them to get on with their lives back home in Canada, where they were born and are citizens.

His father, Ian Wood, a long-time Gabriola resident and property owner, shared notes with the *Sounder* from the most recent meeting of the International Rights of Children Society. Two priorities have been established: getting the story out in the media, particularly in Japan, and fundraising.

For a start, Gabriolans can E-mail the Japanese Ambassador to Canada: [sadaaki.numata@mofa.go.jp](mailto:sadaaki.numata@mofa.go.jp) asking that his country sign the Hague Convention of the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. Write MPs, MLAs, the Ministers of Justice and Foreign Affairs to take action to protect our children from international abduction.

More info is available at [www.irocs.org](http://www.irocs.org) and in brochures at Artworks, where Murray's sister, Kate - well-known island artist - works part-time. Stay tuned.

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