



## New Urgent Action Appeal protesting harassment of homeless people in Tokyo's Sumida Ward

Sanya Welfare Center for Day-Laborer's Association

Updates and detailed explanation of the situation

Here is an update regarding the May 25th seizure of personal items belonging to homeless people as carried out by the Sumida Ward Sports Promotion Division. To check the former Urgent Action Appeal, please click [here](#).

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We, the Sanya Welfare Center for Day-Laborer's Association, went to the Sports Promotion Division on June 25 and submitted our statement signed widely by both domestic and international supporters along with a letter of protest penned by persons from the streets who had come together out of concern for this incident.

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In the letter we asked for: (1) an apology, (2) the return of and/or compensation for belongings taken, (3) clarification of the Ward's legal standing regarding the incident, (4) clarification of any relationship between the removal of personal goods and later expulsion of homeless persons from the area by the police, and (5) a promise that nothing of this nature will occur again. On July 9th, we returned as a group to the Sports Promotion Division for the third time to hear their response. This time, in addition to the Division Manager, the Division Chief was also in attendance. A representative from the Board of Education (which supervises the Sports Promotion Division), who was supposed to have been present, did not show.

The Chief of the Sports Promotion Division repeatedly stated that, with regard to the personal belongings seized, "It was our judgment that the items were rubbish, and so they were handled as such." For that reason, he insisted that there was neither a need to apologize, nor to return or compensate the items taken. He also added that legal protections (such as those given under international covenants on human rights and Japan's Independent Support Act for Homeless People, along with other regulations guiding government procedures) did not apply.

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The fact that they knew items taken were in fact property belonging to persons living on the street was made clear by the content of warnings posted prior to removal. Moreover, it strikes us as strange how the officials would insist that "the items appeared to be rubbish" when the owners of the items had personally stepped forward time and time again to voice their grievances and ask for their belongings to be returned.

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When we asked how the items were judged as "rubbish" the staff replied, "By how they looked." Apparently, they don't realize that these items were anything but trash; rather, they were blankets and cardboard boxes essential to survival, as well as long-held personal items of infinite value, like letters from family.

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During our last visit, we refused to accept their responses, but after 30 minutes the officials excused themselves saying they had "preparations for the election to attend to." After we insisted, they agreed to meet with us again at a later date.

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Right now in Sumida Ward, with construction of the Tokyo Sky Tree underway, homeless and poor persons are



being increasingly displaced and the city as a whole is being rapidly transformed into a more highly commercialized and consumerist space.

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The personal items taken belonged to individuals staying near the Sumida Ward Gymnasium, in an area where homeless persons have been sleeping for over ten years. The gymnasium itself was only just recently demolished, and replaced by a more "modern" gymnasium managed under privately invested capital.

In the face of gentrification and redevelopment, we are firm in our conviction that it is only right to resist and let the world know by our very own voices that, "People live here." We want to bring back the spaces we need to live our lives with human dignity.

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We would like to ask you to help support our protest against the Sumida Ward Sports Promotion Division.

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Please call, fax, or email them to insist that they:

1) apologize for removing personal items belonging to homeless people

2) compensate the victims, or return their items

3) ensure that similar incidents will never occur again.

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Thank you for your kind support!

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