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Japan to recognize Ainu indigenous people for first time – 20th February, 2019

Level 4

Japan will recognize the country's ethnic Ainu group as an "indigenous" people for the first time. Ainu people campaigned for decades for this. The Ainu are an indigenous people from the northern island of Hokkaido and islands between Japan and Russia. Their official number is around 25,000, but people say there are around 200,000. Many Ainu have been completely absorbed into Japanese society. They have little knowledge of their history.

Japan Today wrote about the Ainu's hardships. It said they, "have long suffered the effects of a policy of forced assimilation, and while discrimination has [lessened] gradually, income and education gaps with the rest of Japan persist". Japan said it wants to, "protect the honor and dignity of the Ainu...to realize a vibrant society". An Ainu spokesman said: "It feels like we woke up...from a truly deep sleep...We think this is the first step."

Level 5

Japan has introduced a bill to recognize the country's ethnic Ainu group as an "indigenous" people for the first time. This follows decades of campaigning by Ainu people. The Ainu are an indigenous people originating on Japan's northern island of Hokkaido and islands between Japan and Russia. Their official number today is around 25,000, but many people say a more accurate figure is 200,000. Many Ainu have been completely absorbed into Japanese society. They have little knowledge of their ancestry, history, traditions and culture.

Japan Today wrote about the hardships the Ainu faced. It said: "The Ainu people...have long suffered the effects of a policy of forced assimilation, and while discrimination has receded gradually, income and education gaps with the rest of Japan persist." Japan's government said: "It is important to protect the honor and dignity of the Ainu people and to hand those down to the next generation to realize a vibrant society." An Ainu spokesman said: "It feels like we woke up now from a truly deep sleep....It will lead to building a society where we [live] together. We think this is the first step."

Level 6

The Japanese government has introduced a bill to recognize the country's ethnic Ainu minority group as an "indigenous" people. It is the first time for Japan's government to do this. It comes after decades of lobbying and campaigning by Ainu people to be recognized. The Ainu are an indigenous people of Japan originating in Japan's northern island of Hokkaido, northeastern Honshu, and islands between Japan and Russia. Their official number today is around 25,000, but many observers estimate a more accurate figure to be around 200,000. Many Ainu have been completely assimilated into Japanese society and have no knowledge of their ancestry or historical roots, traditions and culture.

The Japan Today website wrote about the hardships the Ainu have faced. It said: "The Ainu people...have long suffered the effects of a policy of forced assimilation, and while discrimination has receded gradually, income and education gaps with the rest of Japan persist." Japan's government spoke about the importance of passing the new legislation. It said: "It is important to protect the honor and dignity of the Ainu people and to hand those down to the next generation to realize a vibrant society with diverse values." Ainu spokesman Tadashi Kato said: "It feels like we woke up now from a truly deep sleep....It will lead to building a society where we cohabit together. We think this is the first step."