As a conclusion to our course on international understanding, we visited the UNICEF Foundation. What struck me most deeply among the activities UNICEF is trying to tackle was the serious problem of protecting safe drinking water.

At UNICEF, we were shown a metal water barrel. Filled with water, the barrel weighs about 15 kilograms. It was so heavy that my arm hurt just from lifting it a little bit. That day I learned that, in order to satisfy their daily water needs, people in many countries of the world have to walk several kilometers to scoop up water with water barrels like that. In most families, moreover, it is children, and girls in particular, who have to fetch water like this several times a day. I was really struck when I heard this. We also got to see scenes of children who live in arid areas and dig holes in the ground to drink the muddy water that collects in them. I am not able to forget those images.

Because they’re responsible for fetching clean water, these children often have to skip school. I tried to imagine a girl half my age walking barefoot and carrying a heavy load of water on her back through such a wild landscape. I think hard labour like that must have bad effects on the physical development of small children.

The more I learn about UNICEF, the more I change my own lifestyle. For example, I no longer leave the water running or waste paper. I even start feeling sad when I see other people waste things.

Since what I’m doing is only a very small thing, it may seem meaningless. But what I learned from the course we took was not to think, “well, I’m the only one doing it anyway!” That’s because I came to understand the concrete effects of my actions much better than before, when I only had a vague idea of what people meant when they said “let’s save the earth.”

At the foundation of any big movement is one person’s desire to learn and understand. When lots of people start to look at their own world from a larger perspective, our future will definitely move in the right direction. That’s what I’ve learned to believe.