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SUBJECT: Japanese Military's "Comfort Women" System

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The Congressional Research Service prepared this memorandum to enable distribution to more than one congressional client.

This memorandum provides background concerning the system of "comfort women" organized by the Japanese military during the 1930s and World War II to provide sex to Japanese military personnel. For further questions about this issue, the author can be contacted at extension 77680.

Introduction

This report attempts to discuss the comfort women issue from a number of standpoints. It begins with a discussion of two measures that have triggered the debate between the Japanese government and the U.S. House of Representatives: the 2006 and 2007 resolutions before the House International Relations Committee in 2006 and the House Foreign Affairs Committee in 2007 that criticize Japan on the comfort women issue; and the initiative by a special committee of the Japanese parliament (Diet) to amend a key Japanese government pronouncement on the comfort women (the Kono Statement) issued in 1993 that acknowledged and apologized for the Japanese military's direction of the comfort women system. The report tries to summarize in an organized way the numerous statements on the comfort women issue issued by Prime Minister Abe Shinzo and his cabinet since March 1, 2007. It describes the evidence related to the involvement of the Japanese government and military in the system and how the system operated. The report then reviews the Japanese government's past record in addressing the comfort women issue since 1990 and the reactions of former comfort women and their governments to Japan's policies and programs. Other issues covered included the comfort women issue in Japanese history textbooks and comfort women lawsuits in Japanese and U.S. courts. A final "Conclusions" section assesses the credibility of

Japan's policies prior to 2007 and the impact on these policies of the initiative in the Diet to revise the Kono Statement and Prime Minister's Abe's statements since March 1, 2007.

House of Representatives Resolutions

The historical issue of the Japanese military's "comfort women" before and during World War II has become an issue of contention between the Japanese government and Diet (parliament) and the U.S. House of Representatives. The issue has received growing attention from the media in Japan, the United States, and several other countries. The issue of the comfort women has gained increased attention since the early 1990s. The current issue of contention between the Japanese government and the House of Representatives stems from two resolutions introduced into the House of Representatives in 2006 and 2007 and the Japanese reactions to them.

H.Res.759. The first resolution, H.Res.759, was passed by the House International Relations Committee on September 13, 2006. The full House of Representatives did not vote on it before the House adjourned in November 2006. The main provisions of H.Res. 759 were:

—Expressed the sense of the House of Representatives that "the Government of Japan should formally acknowledge and accept responsibility for its sexual enslavement of young women, known to the world as 'comfort women'" during the 1930s and World War II.

—The Government of Japan "organized the subjugation and kidnapping" of comfort women for the purpose of "sexual servitude."

—"Comfort women were either abducted from their homes or lured into sexual servitude under false pretenses."

—The Japanese government's comfort women system resulted in the infliction of "numerous . . . crimes against humanity" against comfort women.

—Historians conclude that as many as 200,000 women "were enslaved."

—There have been efforts in Japan, supported by government officials to minimize and remove accounts of the comfort women system from Japanese school history textbooks.

—The Japanese government should educate current and future generations about "this horrible crime against humanity" and should publicly refute claims that the subjugation and enslavement of comfort women never occurred.

—The Japanese government should follow the recommendations of the United Nations and Amnesty International with respect to the comfort women.

H.Res.121. The second resolution, H.Res.121, was introduced on January 31, 2007, and is currently being considered by the House Foreign Affairs Committee. As of March 31, 2007, it had 75 sponsors in the House of Representatives. Its major provisions are:

—“The Government of Japan should formally acknowledge, apologize, and accept historical responsibility in a clear and unequivocal manner for its Imperial Armed Force’s coercion of young women into sexual slavery” during the 1930s and World War II.

—The Japanese government “officially commissioned the acquisition of young women for the sole purpose of sexual servitude to its Imperial Armed Forces.”

—“The ‘comfort women’ system of forced military prostitution by the Government of Japan” was “considered unprecedented in its cruelty” and was “one of the largest cases of human trafficking in the 20th century.”

—Some textbooks in Japanese schools “seek to downplay the ‘comfort women’ tragedy and other Japanese war crimes during World War II.”

—“Japanese public and private officials” have advocated a dilution or rescission of the 1993 statement by Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono Yohei on comfort women, “which expressed the Government’s sincere apologies and remorse for their ordeal.”

—The Japanese government-supported Asian Women’s Fund is commended for extending \$5.7 million in “atonement” payments to comfort women since 1995.

—The Japanese government should issue an “official apology given as a public statement presented by the Prime Minister of Japan in his official capacity” and publicly refute claims that the comfort women system never existed.

—The Japanese government should educate current and future generations about the comfort women system “while following the recommendations of the international community with respect to the ‘comfort women’.”

Japanese Campaign to Revise the Kono Statement

In October 2006, just a few weeks after Abe Shinzo had become Prime Minister, Japan’s Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary, Shimomura Hakubun, called for a new study of the comfort women issue. Japan’s leading newspaper, *Yomiuri Shimbun*, editorialized that the 1993 statement by Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono Yohei was not supported by sufficient evidence “showing transportation of women for forced labor as sex slaves.”¹ In the Diet (parliament) in early 2007, members of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party set up a Committee to Consider Japan’s Future Historical Education. The committee was backed by Nakagawa Shoichi, head of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party’s chief policy-making body in the Diet. The committee announced that it would act to have the Kono Statement revised. Nakagawa stated on March 9, 2007, that: “There currently is no evidence that permits us to declare the military, the strongest expression of state authority, took women away and forced them to do things against their will.”² Foreign Minister Aso Taro expressed similar sentiment on February 20, 2007, when he voiced doubts that comfort women were ever in the service of the Japanese military and posed the question,

¹We wonder why those remarks are problematic? *Yomiuri Shimbun*, October 31, 2006. P. 3.

²Tokyo denies coercion in war brothels. *Korea Herald* (internet version), March 14, 2007.

“were comfort women ever subject to being in the service of the military?”³ Japanese press reports asserted that the Prime Minister’s office was considering a revision of the Kono Statement.⁴ On March 1, 2007, the Committee to Consider Japan’s Future Historical Education unveiled a draft proposal. The proposal would add to the Kono Statement a statement that “although there may have been forced recruitment of women against their will by [private] traders, there was no forced rounding up of women by the military or other authorities.” The proposal also would insert a sentence that “the grounds [for the Kono Statement’s apology to comfort women] are only the investigation of the oral testimony of former comfort women; no documentary proof was ever discovered.” The proposal also called for the removal of the word “military” from the term, “military comfort women” in the Kono Statement. In issuing the proposed amendments, the Committee cited the proposed H.Res.121 in the U.S. House of Representatives as a justification for revising the Kono Statement.⁵ (See subsequent section, The Kato and Kono Statements)

Statements by Prime Minister Abe and His Government

As this LDP Committee prepared its proposed amendments and the U.S. House of Representatives began to consider H.Res.121 (including a hearing held by the Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment in mid-February 2007), Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo and his Cabinet issued a number of statements in March 2007. Abe’s statements drew both support and criticism from within Japan. Some of the statements drew criticism in the United States and a warning from the U.S. Ambassador to Japan, Thomas Schieffer that attempts to revise the Kono Statement and revise historical accounts of the comfort women system would have a negative impact in the United States.⁶ The Australian and Philippine government also voiced criticisms. Prime Minister Abe’ statements contained the following main features:

—“There is no evidence to back up that there was coercion as defined initially” in the role of “the Japanese military or government” in recruiting comfort women.

—There were apparent cases of coercion by private recruiters for the military, but “it was not as though military police broke into people’s homes and took them away like kidnappers,” and “testimony to the effect that there had been a hunt for comfort women is a complete fabrication.”

³Move begins in the government and LDP to block the adoption of a resolution by the US House of Representatives condemning Japan on the comfort-women issue; group also probing into revising the Kono Statement. Sankei Shimbun, February 20, 2007. P. 3.

⁴Move begins in the government and LDP to block the adoption of a resolution by the U.S. House of Representatives condemning Japan on the comfort women issue; group also probing into revising the Kono statement. Sankei Shimbun, February 20, 2007. P. 3.

⁵LDP lawmakers interested in the comfort women issue say: ‘there was no forced rounding up of women by the military’; seek revision of the Kono Statement. Yomiuri Shimbun, March 1, 2007. P. 4.

⁶See, for example, the front page article, Denial Reopens Wounds of Japan’s ex-sex slaves. New York Times, March 8, 2007. P. A1. For criticisms by former Assistant Secretary of Defense Kurt Campbell and former National Security Council Asian Affairs Director, Michael Green, see Kato, Yoichi. U.S. experts concerned about Prime Minister Abe’s remarks about comfort women issue. Asahi Shimbun, March 10, 2007. P. 2. For Ambassador Schieffer’s remarks, see The Nelson Report, March 12, 2007. P. 3.

—Reportedly referring to the testimony of former comfort women, he said on March 5, 2007, that “testimony to the effect that there had been a hunt for comfort women is a complete fabrication.”⁷ He reportedly gave a no comment reply to an opposition member of the Diet who asked him on March 26, 2007, whether he considered as evidence of coercion the testimony of former comfort women.⁸

—The Japanese government would not issue an apology to comfort women in response to passage of H.Res.121 by the U.S. House of Representatives.⁹

Abe also noted that the Japanese government had taken previous steps to deal with the comfort women issue, including “extending our apologies to them on a number of occasions.”¹⁰ He stated his intent to preserve the key measures taken by prior Japanese governments.

—He would “stand by the Kono Statement.”¹¹ However, a Japanese Cabinet statement of March 16, 2007, seemed to dilute this statement by noting that the Kono Statement was not formally endorsed by the then Cabinet of Prime Minister Miyazawa Kiichi and that successive Japanese cabinets after 1993 had inherited it.¹²

—He endorsed the letters of apology of his predecessors to comfort women who received assistance from the Asian Women’s Fund: “Former Prime Ministers, including Prime Ministers Koizumi and Hashimoto, have issued letters to the comfort women. I would like to be clear that I carry the same feeling. This has not changed even slightly.”¹³

—Abe stated in the Diet on March 26, 2007, that “I apologize here and now as Prime Minister,” adding that “I express my sympathy toward the comfort women and apologize for the situation they found themselves in.”

⁷Fackler, Martin. No apology for sex slavery, Japan’s Prime Minister says. *New York Times*, March 6, 2007. P. A10.

⁸Onishi, Norimitsu. Japan leader who denied state role in wartime sex slavery still apologizes. *New York Times*, March 27, 2007.

⁹For these statements, see Tabuchi, Hiroko. Prime Minister denies women were forced into WWII brothels. *Washington Post*, March 2, 2007. P. A9. Sieg, Linda. Japan won’t apologize again for WW2 sex slaves—PM. *Reuters News*, March 4, 2007. Fackler, Martin. No apology for sex slavery, Japan’s Prime Minister says. *New York Times*, March 6, 2007. P. A9.

¹⁰Fackler, Martin. No apology for sex slavery, Japan’s Prime Minister says. *New York Times*, March 6, 2007. P. A9. Statement by Prime Minister Abe during debate in the Budget Committee in the Upper House of the Diet, March 9, 2007.

¹¹Abe will stand by 1993 statement over sex slavery. *The Wall Street Journal Asia*, March 5, 2007. P. 8. Sieg, Linda. Japan won’t apologize again for WW2 sex slaves—PM. *Reuters News*, March 4, 2007. Interview with Prime Minister Abe by NHK Television, March 11, 2007.

¹²No evidence to establish forced recruitment of ‘comfort women’: Japan. *Kyodo News*, March 16, 2007.

¹³Interview with Prime Minister Abe by NHK Television, March 11, 2007.

—Abe also partially revised his statements on coercion, stating: “There probably was not anyone [comfort women] who followed that path because they wanted to follow it. In the broad sense, there was coercion.”¹⁴

—In a telephone conversation with President Bush on April 3, 2007, “Prime Minister Abe affirmed that he stood by the consistent position of the Government of Japan, represented by the statement of the former Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono, and expressed heartfelt sympathy and sincere apologies to the women who suffered immeasurable pain and hardships.”¹⁵

The conflicting nature of Prime Minister Abe’s statement and his government’s position on the Kono Statement was demonstrated by two contrasting statements issued by the Abe Cabinet. Chief Cabinet Secretary Shiozaki Yasuhisa issued a statement on March 5, 2007. Shiozaki described the Kono Statement as acknowledging the involvement of the Japanese military in the comfort women system. The recruitment of comfort women, he said, “was conducted mainly by private recruiters who acted in response to the request of the military.” The military also “at times. . .directly took part in the recruitments.” The recruitment was “in many cases. . .against their will through coaxing, coercion, etc.” Shiozaki stated that: The Government’s stance is clear that it admits what the Kono Statement said and the Government stands by the Statement as I explained already.”¹⁶ However, his statement appears to be contradicted by the statement issued by the Cabinet on March 16, 2007, that the Cabinet had reviewed documents that the government had used in 1991-1993 to issue a report that was the basis of the Kono Statement. The Cabinet statement declared that: “Among the materials which were studied in that research and investigation, the Government did not find a description which directly proves that there was so-called coercive recruitment by the military or government authority.”¹⁷

Abe adopted a relatively positive stance toward the intention of LDP leaders in the Diet to review the Kono Statement. He was quoted: “I was told the party will conduct an investigation or a study, so we will provide government documents and cooperate as necessary.”¹⁸

Evidence Related to the Comfort Women System

The comfort women system emerged as Japan began its policy of military expansion into China in the 1930s. The system was expanded when Japan attacked the United States in December 1941 and the Japanese military entered Southeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific. These women were given the name “comfort women.” Most estimates of the number of these “comfort women” range from 50,000 to 200,000. A

¹⁴Fackler, Martin. No apology for sex slavery, Japan’s Prime Minister says. New York Times, March 6, 2007. P. A9.

¹⁵Press guidance statement of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 3, 2007.

¹⁶Press Conference by Shiozaki Yasuhisa, Chief Cabinet Secretary, March 5, 2007.

¹⁷Answer from the Cabinet to Representative Kiyomi Tsujimoto’s Question. March 16, 2007. No evidence to establish forced recruitment of ‘comfort women’: Japan. Kyodo News, March 16, 2007. Japan cabinet: no evidence establishing coercion of sex slaves. Dow Jones International News, March 16, 2007.

¹⁸Lee, Joo-hee. Pressure mounts on sex slave issue. Korea Herald (internet version), March 10, 2007.

sizeable plurality or a majority of them were Korean. Chinese, Taiwanese, Filipino, Dutch, and Indonesian women made up most of the rest.

While information about the comfort women system appeared periodically after World War II, it was not until the 1980s and early 1990s that major publications appeared in Japan describing details of the system and governments and citizens of countries occupied by Japan began to discuss it more openly. In the 1990s, the issue of comfort women became part of the dispute between Japan and several neighboring countries over whether Japan had accounted fully for its aggression against its neighbors and the abuses of its occupation policies. Governments and civic groups in Japan and Japanese-occupied countries debated several issues: whether Japan had acknowledged fully the responsibility of the Japanese military and government for the abuses of the comfort women system; whether Japanese apologies to former comfort women constituted a sufficient official apology; whether Japan should pay official monetary compensation to comfort women; and whether Japanese school history textbooks should describe the comfort women system in their chapters on World War II.

Several bodies of evidence emerged or were developed in the 1990s and 2000s regarding the operation of the comfort women system. The main ones were:

—The research of historian, Dr. Yoshimi Yoshiaki, in 1992 in the library of the Japan Self-Defense Forces. Dr. Yoshimi found and disclosed a number of documents of the Japanese army in occupied China in the late 1930s regarding the comfort women system. Dr. Yoshimi handed the documents to the *Asahi Shimbun*, one of Japan's biggest newspapers, which ran a feature story on them on January 11, 1992. He wrote a book, published in 1995, detailing the documents, *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military During World War II*.

—Documents discovered in the late 1990s by Chu Te-lan, a history professor with the Academia Sinica in Taiwan. These documents described relations between the Japanese army, the Japanese colonial government on Taiwan, and a Taiwan Development Company regarding the comfort women system.

—A report of the U.S. Office of War Information of October 1, 1944, concerning the interview of 20 Korean comfort women found at Myintkyina at northern Burma in August 1944 after allied forces had captured Myintkyina from the Japanese. (The report is in the U.S. National Archives.)

—A reference to the recruiting of comfort women in Korea by an American missionary in Korea, Horace H. Underwood, in a report to the U.S. Government after his repatriation by Japan in August 1942. (The report is in the U.S. National Archives)

—A report by the U.S. Office of Strategic Services (OSS) of May 6, 1945 on interviews of 23 Korean comfort women in Kunming, China. The women had escaped the Japanese army units they were serving and had reached Chinese lines in September 1944. (The report is in the U.S. National Archives.)

—A South Korean Foreign Ministry report of 1992, citing Japanese military documents on the comfort women system in Korea.

—The Report of a Study of Dutch Government Documents on the Forced Prostitution of Dutch Women in the Dutch East Indies during the Japanese Occupation, released in 1994. Also Document AS 5200 from the Dutch National Archives, which contains interrogation texts of Japanese suspects in war crimes committed against Dutch women, testimony of Dutch and Eurasian comfort women, and testimony of camp leaders and other internees of Japanese military-run internment camps on Java for Dutch women. AS 5200 also contains court proceedings of the War Crimes Tribunals on comfort women cases conducted by the Dutch military in 1947 and 1948.

—A Japanese government study of 1992-1993 based on documents from Japanese ministries and government agencies and interviews with former comfort women, former Japanese military personnel, former officials of the Japanese colonial government in Korea, and former operators of “comfort stations.” This report was the basis for the Kono Statement.

—The testimony of several hundred former comfort women from Korea, China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, and the Netherlands. Many of these are described in the book, *Japan’s Comfort Women*, by Yuki Tanaka, published in 2002, which references over 400 women who gave testimonies.

These documents and reports provide information on three issues that have been debated in Japan and between Japan and other countries regarding the comfort women system:

(1) The degree of involvement of the Japanese military and government in creating the comfort women system: The evidence is clear that the Japanese government and military directly created the comfort women system. The Japanese government’s 1992-1993 report found that military officials in different locales initiated the process of establishing comfort stations in their locales. The military also helped to equip the comfort stations and drew up the regulations for their operations.¹⁹ The Taiwan documents found by Chu Te-lan described the founding of the Taiwan Development Company by the Japanese colonial government in Taiwan for the purpose of supporting Japan’s invasion of China. By 1939, the colonial government directed the Taiwan Development Company to recruit and send Taiwanese comfort women to China’s Hainan island. On Hainan, the Japanese military supervised all activities of the Taiwan Development Company including the construction of 62 comfort stations.²⁰ The Yoshimi documents establish that Japanese military units in China initiated the process of establishing comfort stations in northern and central China following the Japanese invasion of China in 1937.²¹ One such document, issued by the Chief of Staff of the Northern China Area Army in July 1938, instructed units under the Area Army’s

¹⁹ The summary findings of the Japanese government’s report was issued by the Cabinet Councillor’s Office on External Affairs on August 4, 1993 under the title, On the Issue of Wartime “Comfort Women.”

²⁰ Academia Sinica issues report on ‘comfort women.’ Taiwan Central News Agency (internet version), July 9, 1939. Ganz, Susanne. Documents may prove Japan’s role in wartime sex slavery. Kyodo News Agency (Tokyo), July 13, 1939.

²¹ Documents indicate military involvement—Japanese military notices and reports in Defense Agency Library. Asahi Shimbun, January 11, 1992. P. 1. Yoshimi, Yoskiaki. *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military during World War II*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995. P. 49-61.

command that “the provision of facilities for sexual comfort as quickly as possible is of great importance.”²² The South Korean Foreign Ministry’s report of 1992 cited similar orders from the Japanese army in Korea to establish comfort women facilities.²³

(2) Whether the Japanese military was involved in the recruitment and transportation of comfort women and in administering the “comfort stations” where the women provided sex for Japanese soldiers. The evidence describes the involvement of the Japanese military at all stages in the operation of the system: the recruitment of women, the transport of the women, and the operation of comfort stations. The evidence indicates that the military and Japanese colonial governments often contracted with private parties, such as the Taiwan Development Corporation, to recruit comfort women. The Korean comfort women interviewed by U.S. military personnel at Myitkyina, Burma, stated that they signed a contract at the time of recruitment that specified that they would be subject to Japanese army regulations.²⁴ One of the Yoshimi documents, dated March 4, 1938, was from the Japanese Ministry of the Army to the Northern China Area Army, entitled “Regarding the Recruitment of Women to Staff Military Comfort Stations.” The Ministry issued the following instruction: “The expeditionary forces shall control recruiting, and the people to be commissioned to do this shall be chosen carefully and appropriately. As for implementation, close contact will be maintained with the military police and police authorities in the relevant regions, and the utmost care shall be taken so as to preserve military dignity and avoid social problems.”²⁵ Especially noteworthy, then Vice Minister of the Army, General Umezu Yoshijiro, signed the document. General Umezu later became Army Chief of Staff and a member of the inner Japanese war cabinet during the last year of World War II. He signed for the Army the Japanese surrender document on the Battleship Missouri on September 2, 1945. Other Yoshimi documents describe comfort stations in northern China as being set up by the Japanese army and under the supervision of local Japanese army commands.²⁶ The evidence indicates that comfort stations in many locales were run by civilians, sometimes called “house masters.” However, local army commands established detailed regulations for the operation of the comfort stations, including hours of operation, separate times when officers and enlisted men could see the comfort women, the stationing of military police at comfort stations, and medical examinations and treatment. The Korean women at Myitkyina described these regulations during their questioning by U.S. military officials. The summary findings of the Japanese government’s 1993 report stresses this point in its description of the operation of the comfort stations.

(3) Whether women were brought into the comfort women system and served there voluntarily or involuntarily. This involves the methods used in recruitment of the women and the women’s status at the comfort stations. Statements by Prime Minister Abe and in H.Res.121 have used the word “coercion” in portraying this issue. The American

²²Yoshimi, *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military During World War II*, P. 54-55.

²³Hicks, George. *Ghosts fathering*. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, February 18, 1993. P. 32-36. Yonhap News Agency (Seoul) reports, July 31, 1992.

²⁴U.S. Office of War Information. *Japanese Prisoner of War Interrogation Report No. 49*. October 1, 1944. P. 1.

²⁵Documents indicate military involvement—Japanese military notices and reports in Defense Agency Library. *Asahi Shimbun*, January 11, 1992. P. 1.

²⁶*Ibid.*

College Dictionary defines coerce and coercion as “to compel by forcible action” and “forcible constraint.” Of the 400 plus testimonies cited in Yuki Tanaka’s *Japan’s Comfort Women*, nearly 200 of these women described forcible seizure by Japanese military or military police officials or by agents of the military. This was especially true of Filipino, Chinese, and Dutch women.²⁷ The summary findings of the Japanese government’s report of 1993 states that “recruiters resorted in many cases to coaxing and intimidating these women to be recruited against their own will.” The report, itself, reportedly stated that “there were many cases that businesses, requested by the Army, drew women with sweet words or by force.”²⁸

Testimony by Filipino and Chinese women and Japanese military documents also describe widespread rapes by Japanese soldiers in China and the Philippines. The order cited above from the Chief of Staff of the North China Area Army referred to “widespread rape committed by Japanese military personnel in many places.” Rapes apparently were committed in large numbers in areas of heavy fighting between the Japanese army and Chinese forces or between the Japanese army and the large bands of Filipino guerrillas that had emerged by 1943-1944. Local Japanese units were reported to have abducted local Filipino and Chinese girls, held them for a number of weeks and months, where they were raped repeatedly. The Dutch government also documented testimony from a large number of Dutch women who claim that Japanese soldiers raped them in the days immediately after the Japanese invasion of the Dutch East Indies in 1942.²⁹

Forcible conscription is charged and documented in the Dutch government’s War Crimes Tribunals, as documented in Document AS 5200 of the Dutch National Archives and the 1994 Dutch government’s Report of a Study of Dutch Government Documents on the Forced Prostitution of Dutch Women in the Dutch East Indies during the Japanese Occupation. These proceedings and reports document a number of cases in which the Japanese army forcibly removed Dutch women from internment camps under the army’s supervision (sometimes after camp inmates resisted) and compelled them to serve as comfort women. A number of Japanese army officers were convicted of crimes against Dutch women by the Dutch War Crimes Tribunals. The proceedings and reports also documents the forced conscription of Eurasian and Indonesian women.³⁰

The evidence points to deception as a common practice of military and military contractor procurers. The Korean women at Myitkyina told U.S. military interviewers that recruiters told them and many other Korean women in Burma that they would be working in hospitals in Singapore caring for wounded Japanese troops. Most of the Korean women at Kunming, China, testified that they and about 300 other Korean comfort women were recruited through advertisements in Korean newspapers offering employment for Korean girls in Japanese factories in Singapore. The OSS report from Kunming concluded that “all of the 23 women became ‘comfort girls’, apparently under compulsion and misrepresentation.” Many other accounts given by former comfort women describe deception by recruiters. The South Korean Foreign Ministry’s report

²⁷Tanaka, Yuki. *Japan’s Comfort Women*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002.

²⁸Ministry approves of ‘comfort women’ in textbooks. Kyodo News Agency, June 26, 1997.

²⁹Tanaka, Yuki, *Japan Comfort Women*, p. 16, 28-29, 44-50, 61-63.

³⁰*Ibid.* P. 61-83. The experiences of Dutch, Eurasian, and Indonesian women are described in detail.

cites common cases of deception by Japanese and contractor recruiters. The U.S. Office of War Information also published a report from Horace H. Underwood, an American missionary in Korea up to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. He described the Japanese “procuring of a variety of methods of large numbers of Korean girls, to be shipped to Manchurian and Chinese brothels” and this was “a fertile cause of hate” among Koreans.³¹ Recruiters also used an apparent combination of inducements and intimidation aimed at the families of young girls that were significantly in debt to Japanese-sanctioned financial institutions. The Korean women at Myintkyina testified that recruiters told them that volunteering to work at hospitals was a way to pay off their families’ debts. Many of the women’s testimonies cited in Yuki Tanaka’s book that do not claim forced coercion described similar deceptive practices by recruiters on them.

The testimony of the Korean women at Myintkyina and other testimonies make clear that once women arrived at the comfort stations, they served there until the Japanese army released them and allowed them to return home. The Korean women testified that the army released some of the Korean women at Myintkyina in 1943; but their account and many others indicate that many were in the comfort stations for the duration of World War II. The story of the Korean women at Kunming indicates that the women chose the hazardous course of escape across the Japanese-Chinese battle front because the Japanese military did not allow them to return to Korea voluntarily.

The debate over coercion in the recruitment of comfort women in 2007 has obscured the broader issue of whether comfort women were in the system on a voluntarily or involuntarily basis. There is no doubt from the available evidence that most comfort women were in the system involuntarily if one defines involuntarily to include entering the system in response to deceptive recruitment. There appears to have been little of a genuinely voluntarily nature to the system.

The Kato and Kono Statements, 1992 and 1993

The unveiling of the Yoshimi documents in 1992 led to the Japanese government’s own study conducted between 1991 and 1993. As a result of the findings of that study, the Chief Secretary of the Japanese Cabinet, the official spokesman for the government, issued two statements in 1992 and 1993. The first, issued by Chief Cabinet Secretary Kato Koichi on July 6, 1992, contained these main points:

—The Japanese government “had been involved in the establishment of comfort stations, the control of those who recruited comfort women, the construction and reinforcement of comfort facilities, the management and surveillance of comfort stations, the hygiene maintenance in comfort stations and among comfort women, and the issuance of identification as well as other documents to those who were related to comfort stations.”

—“The Government again would like to express its sincere apology and remorse to all those who have suffered indescribable hardship as so-called ‘wartime comfort women’, irrespective of their nationality or place of birth.”

³¹U.S. Office of War Information. Survey of Current Political and Temper of the Korean People. August 15, 1942.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono Yohei issued the government's statement of August 4, 1993. It contained these main points:

—There were “a great number of comfort women.”

—“Comfort stations were operated in response to the request of the military authorities of the day, and the “military was, directly or indirectly, involved in the establishment and management of the comfort stations and the transfer of comfort women.”

—“The recruitment of the comfort women was conducted mainly by private recruiters who acted in response to the request of the military.”

—Comfort women, “in many cases. . .were recruited against their own will, through coaxing, coercion, etc, and that, at times, administrative/military personnel directly took part in the recruitments.”

—Comfort women “lived in misery at comfort stations under a coercive atmosphere.”

—“A large part” of the comfort women were Korean.

—“The Government of Japan would like to take this opportunity once again to extend its sincere apologies and remorse to all those, irrespective of place of origin, who suffered immeasurable pain and incurable physical and psychological wounds as comfort women.”

The Asian Women's Fund

In the admissions of 1992 and 1993, Japanese government officials stated that the government would try to assist surviving comfort women. The government's response was the Asian Women's Fund, which the government of Socialist Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi set up and which came into being on July 19, 1995. The Asian Women's Fund announced three programs for former comfort women who applied for assistance: (1) an atonement fund that paid two million yen (approximately \$20,000) to each former comfort woman; (2) medical and welfare support programs for former comfort women, paying 2.5-3 million yen (\$25,000-\$30,000) for each former comfort woman; and (3) a letter of apology from the Japanese Prime Minister to each recipient woman.³²

The atonement fund issued payments directly to former comfort women from 1996 through 2002, when it ceased operations. During that time, it paid 565 million yen (approximately \$5.7 million) to 285 former comfort women. The medical and support programs continued beyond 2002 in some countries. As of March 2006, the Asian Women's Fund provided 700 million yen (approximately \$7 million) for these programs in South Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines; 380 million yen (approximately \$3.8 million) in Indonesia; and 242 million yen (approximately \$2.4 million) in the

³² From the Asian Women's Fund website, March 16, 2006.

Netherlands.³³ The Asian Women's Fund is scheduled to end its operations in March 2007.

A controversial issue in the Asian Women's Fund programs was the money provided directly by the Japanese government. The government paid the operational expenses of the Asian Women's Fund—a total of 35 billion yen (approximately \$35 million) from 1995 through March 2000.³⁴ The government also paid the costs of the medical and support programs. However, the government refused to finance the atonement fund payments. These were financed through private Japanese contributions. According to a Japanese Foreign Ministry statement of May 2004, the Asian Women's Fund had obtained 590 million yen from private contributors, including “individuals, enterprises, labor unions, political parties, Diet members and Cabinet Ministers.” The government did finance the Asian Women's Fund's campaigns to raise money. The government's position on direct compensation payments has been that the Peace Treaty between Japan and the Allied Powers of 1951 required Japan to pay reparations directly to occupied countries and allied countries and that these reparations covered any potential claims from individuals in these countries. Japan had entered into several such agreements with occupied countries. The government also reportedly has feared that direct compensation payments to former comfort women would result in other groups claiming abuse by Japan during World War II demanding similar compensation.³⁵ Critics, however, charged that the unwillingness of the government to make direct compensation payments signified an unwillingness to accept full responsibility for the comfort women system.

Prime Minister's Letters of Apology to Former Comfort Women

At the founding of the Asian Women's Fund in July 1995, Prime Minister Murayama promised to send a letter of apology to each recipient of assistance from the Asian Women's Fund. He described the comfort women system as a “national mistake” and “entirely inexcusable.”³⁶ However, his successor, Hashimoto Ryutaro, leader of the conservative Liberal Democratic Party, stated that he would not issue such letters when he took office in 1996 and the Asian Women's Fund prepared to implement the first atonement payments. This brought forth criticism of the Prime Minister from board members of the Asian Women's Fund. Miki Mutsuko, the wife of former Prime Minister Miki Takeo, resigned from her position on the board in protest. Prime Minister Hashimoto shifted his position in July 1996, and he issued the first apology letters in August 1996.³⁷ The identical letters from four Japanese Prime Ministers (Hashimoto,

³³ The inclusion of the Netherlands was due to Dutch women who were taken captive by the Japanese after Japan invaded the Dutch East Indies and forced to become comfort women.

³⁴ Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Recent Policy of the Government of Japan on the Issue known as “Wartime Comfort Women.” November 1, 2001.

³⁵ Pollack, Andrew. Japan plans payment for forcing women into brothels during war. New York Times, August 31, 1994, p. A1.

³⁶ Reid, T.R. Japanese leader apologizes to ‘comfort women,’ backs plan for recompense. Washington Post, July 19, 1995. P. A22.

³⁷ Pollack, Andrew. Japan pays some women from war brothels, but many refuse. New York Times, August 15, 1996. P. A11.

Obuchi, Mori, and Koizumi) to recipients of the Asian Women's Fund atonement payments have stated the following points:

—He was speaking “as Prime Minister of Japan.”

—“The issue of comfort women, with an involvement of the Japanese military authorities at the time, was a grave affront to the honor and dignity of large numbers of women.”

—The Prime Minister expresses “my most sincere apologies and remorse to the women who underwent immeasurable and painful experiences and suffered incurable physical and psychological wounds as comfort women.”

—The Prime Minister addresses all comfort women rather than just the individual recipient of the letter.

—He asserts that “our country, painfully aware of its moral responsibilities, with feelings of apology and remorse, should face up squarely to its past history and accurately convey it to future generations.” The Japanese word for “apology” in the letter, *shazai* (*sajoe* in Korean) is a particularly strong term that implies the admission of a crime.³⁸

Foreign Reactions to the Asian Women's Fund

The 285 women who received atonement payments from the Asian Women's Fund between 1996 and 2002 undoubtedly represented a very small percentage of former comfort women still living. Moreover, it appears that nearly 200 of these were Filipino and Dutch women (79 from the Netherlands and over 100 estimated from the Philippines), although with the exception of the Dutch women, the Asian Women's Fund has been circumspect in publicizing information about individual recipients. There have been far fewer recipients in Taiwan (about 40) and especially in South Korea. There appear to be three reasons for this situation. One is the social stigma a woman could suffer, especially in Asian societies, if she openly revealed that she was a comfort woman by applying for compensation. A second is that some former comfort women, especially members of organized groups in several countries, openly rejected the atonement payments because they are not official Japanese government compensation. A third reason seems to be pressure and possible intimidation applied by governments and non-government groups (NGOs) on women not to accept payments and other assistance from the Asian Women's Fund. This factor appears to have been especially prevalent in South Korea.

The South Korean government announced a compensation plan for surviving former comfort women on March 29, 1993, that would pay the equivalent of \$6,400 and a

³⁸ Soh, C. Sarah. Japan's Responsibility Toward Comfort Women Survivors. JPRI Working Paper No. 77. Japan Policy, May 2001.

monthly payment of \$250 to each woman.³⁹ However, after the Asian Women's Fund was established, the government and South Korean NGOs used the government's fund as a tool to pressure and dissuade former Korean comfort women from accepting payments and other assistance from the Asian Women's Fund. The South Korean government took an immediate position against the Asian Women's Fund when the Fund made atonement payments to seven South Korean women in January 1997. The government officially expressed displeasure to the Japanese government over the Asian Women's Fund and demanded that the Japanese government pay direct compensation. The South Korean government also supported the similar stance taken by the leading Korean NGOs claiming to represent former Korean comfort women: the Korea Council for Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan. and the Citizens' Coalition for the Resolution of the Forced Recruitment of Comfort Women by the Japanese Military.⁴⁰ These groups sharply criticized the seven women who had accepted payments from the Asian Women's Fund. At the recommendation of these groups, in March 1998, the South Korean government announced an upgrading of its fund for former Korean comfort women, offering larger payments. South Korean officials stated that the South Korean fund was intended to eliminate the possibility that Korean women would accept assistance from the Asian Women's Fund, and this became a required condition for any woman who applied to the South Korean government's fund. The Korea Council and the Citizens' Coalition also campaigned against women accepting assistance from the Asian Women's Fund. They raised money for former comfort women but conditioned payments on pledges by the women not to accept any assistance from the Asian Women's Fund. The result was that no other Korean women applied for assistance from the Asian Women's Fund after the original seven had received atonement payments in January 1997.⁴¹ The Asian Women's Fund reportedly sought to continue offering assistance in South Korea beyond the original five year deadline which ended in 2002; but it ultimately decided to end its program partly because of South Korean government and NGO opposition.⁴²

After March 1998, the South Korean fund made a lump sum payment of 43 million won (approximately \$43,000) to each eligible former comfort woman for living expenses plus an additional monthly allotment of 740,000 won (approximately \$740) per person. The fund also made payments for the medical expenses of individual comfort women. Thus, the South Korean fund after March 1998 was more generous in direct payments than the Asian Women's Fund. However, as of March 2006, only 208 South Korean women had applied to the South Korean fund; and the government managers of the fund had accepted 152 of these as legitimate former comfort women. Currently 124 women

³⁹ Boling, David. Mass Rape, Enforced Prostitution, and the Japanese Imperial Army: Japan Eschews International Legal Responsibility? *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law*. No. 3, 1995. P. 545.

⁴⁰ Korean women compensated for sex slavery. *Washington Times*, January 12, 1997. P. A6.

⁴¹ Strom, Stephanie. Seoul won't seek Japan funds for war's brothel women. *New York Times*, April 22, 1998. P. A3. ROK to provide compensation to compensate comfort women. *Yonhap News Agency* (Seoul), March 11, 1998. Soh, Japan's Responsibility Toward Comfort Women Survivors, *Japan Policy*. May 2001. Soh, Chunghee Sarah. *Human Rights and Humanity: The Case of the "Comfort Women."* The ICAS Lectures, December 4, 1998.

⁴² Asian Women's Fund to end sex slave payments in South Korea. *Kyodo New Agency* (Tokyo) report, February 19, 2002.

are receiving aid from the fund.⁴³ The small number of responders to the South Korean government's highly publicized fund raises the question of whether a larger number of comfort women would respond to either Japanese government or their own governments' compensation plan, or whether the social stigma of revealing one's identity as a former comfort woman is too much of a deterrent.

Taiwan established its own compensation fund in 1996. The government and the Taipei Women's Rescue Foundation (TWRP), a private organization, provided money for the fund. It paid each former comfort woman 500,000 New Taiwan Dollars, roughly the equivalent of the Asian Women's Fund atonement payments. The government and the TWRP have maintained that Japan should pay official compensation. An estimated 40 Taiwanese women have received assistance from the Asian Women's Fund.⁴⁴ However, opposition to the Asian Women's Fund apparently was not as overt as in South Korea; the Fund advertised its programs in Taiwan newspapers during this period.⁴⁵

The Asian Women's Fund carried out programs in the Philippines, Indonesia, and the Netherlands; and in these countries much of the Fund's money came from the Japanese government for broader social welfare programs for the women. Philippine President Fidel Ramos stated that the Fund, though legally private, could help former Filipino comfort women.⁴⁶ On January 15, 1997, the Asian Women's Fund and the Philippine government signed a Memorandum of Understanding for medical and welfare support programs for former comfort women. Over the next five years, these were implemented by the Philippine government's Department of Social Welfare and Development. However, two NGO groups split over whether Filipino women should accept atonement payments from the Asian Women's Fund. LILA Pilipina officially demanded Japanese government payments but assisted women to apply to the Asian Women's Fund. Malaya Lolas, on the other hand, rejected the Asian Women's Fund. It is estimated that over 100 Filipino women accepted atonement payments from the Fund.⁴⁷

In March 1997, the Asian Women's Fund signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Indonesian government's Department of Social Affairs providing for the Fund to support an Indonesian project, "Promotion of Social Welfare Services for Elderly People in Indonesia." Asian Women's Fund financial support was to total 380 million yen (approximately \$38 million) over ten years to support facilities for the elderly with priority to be given to former comfort women. The Indonesian government favored this plan over receiving and authenticating applications from individual women.⁴⁸

⁴³ Information supplied by the Embassy of Korea in Washington, March 17 and March 21, 2006.

⁴⁴ Soh, Human Rights and Humanity: the Case of the "Comfort Women," The ICAS Lectures, December 4, 1998. Mao Huan-wen. Former comfort women lodge protest. Taipei Times, August 16, 2005. P. 1. Soh, Japan's Responsibility Toward Comfort Women Survivors, Japan Policy, May 2001.

⁴⁵ Ibid. Asian Women's Fund website, March 15, 2006.

⁴⁶ Kristof, Nicholas D. Japan to pay women forced into brothels. New York Times, June 15, 1995. P. A10.

⁴⁷ Soh, Japan's Responsibility Toward Comfort Women Survivors, Japan Policy, May 2001.

⁴⁸ Soh, Human Rights and Humanity: The Case of the "Comfort Women," The ICAS Lectures, December 4, 1998.

According to the Japanese Foreign Ministry's statement of May 2004, 200 people were accommodated in those facilities.

The Asian Women's Fund negotiated initially with the Dutch Foundation for Japanese Honorary Debts (FJHD), an NGO of Dutch war victims, including comfort women, but the FJHD rejected compensation from the Fund. With the support of the Dutch government, the Asian Women's Fund concluded a Memorandum of Understanding with another private Dutch group, the Project Implementation Committee in the Netherlands (PICN), to assist the livelihood of former comfort women. The project provided medical and other social services to the women. Over a period of three years, the Asian Women's Fund spent 241.5 million yen (approximately \$24 million) for the project, which assisted 79 women.⁴⁹

H.Res.759 called on the Japanese government to follow the recommendations of the United Nations and Amnesty International. H.Res.121 calls on the Japanese government to follow the recommendations of "the international community." The United Nations Human Rights Commission investigated the comfort women issue several times in the 1990s. Two reports to the Commission by U.N. Special Rapporteurs in 1996 and 1998 criticized Japan and called for Japan to pay official compensation to former comfort women and prosecute Japanese who were responsible for the system. However, while the Human Rights Commission acknowledged the reports, it did not fully endorse their recommendations in its resolutions. In September 2001, the Commission recommended to Japan that "victims [of Japan during World War II] must be compensated."⁵⁰ The international human rights organization, Amnesty International, has criticized the Asian Women's Fund and has called on Japan to pay official compensation to former comfort women.⁵¹

The Comfort Women Issue in Japanese Textbooks

Since Japan's admission of responsibility for the comfort women system, there have been frequent disputes over whether Japanese history textbooks should discuss comfort women. The real battle today in Japan over the comfort women issue is whether Japanese history textbooks will discuss it. In 1997, the Japanese Ministry of Education allowed some new middle-school textbooks to discuss comfort women as a form of sexual slavery based on the "forcible recruitment" of women. This decision and the issuance of the textbooks produced considerable criticism from some Japanese politicians and interest groups who contend that Japan's historical record in the first half of the 20th century is not as negative as it usually is portrayed.⁵² A Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform was formed to work for the publication of history textbooks that presented a positive view of Japanese history. Undoubtedly as a consequence of this

⁴⁹ Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On the Completion of the Atonement Project of the Asian Women's Fund (AWF) in the Netherlands. July 13, 2001. Soh, Human Rights and Humanity: The Case of the "Comfort Women," The ICAS Lectures, December 4, 1998.

⁵⁰ Washington Committee on Comfort Women. Chronology of Dates and Events. April 5, 2006. UN rapporteur tells Japan to face sex slave history. Agency France Presse (Hong Kong), June 2, 1999.

⁵¹ Amnesty International urges Japan to compensate for sex slavery. Korea Times (internet version), October 28, 2006.

⁵² Washio Ako. Textbook sex slave entries face growing opposition. Japan Times Weekly International Edition, March 3-9, 1997. P. 3.

criticism and the campaign of the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform, eight new textbooks approved in 2001 did not mention comfort women. The South Korean government protested by canceling a number of planned exchanges with Japan.⁵³ In 2005, a new group of eight approved textbooks omitted references to comfort women; only one textbook contained a reference to comfort women.⁵⁴ Nakayama Nariaki, the Minister of Education, supported the omissions, stating that references to comfort women

⁵³ Yoo, Jae-suk. History-book row estranges allies. *Washington Times*, July 13, 2001. P. A1.

⁵⁴ Faiola, Anthony. Japanese schoolbooks anger S. Korea, China. *Washington Post*, April 6, 2005. P. A15.

in textbooks was an “incorrect description.”⁵⁵ However, the Japanese government asserts that 16 or 18 approved history textbooks for use in high schools in 2006 specifically refer to comfort women. At the same time, however, a commission of scholars from Japan, South Korea, and China published a history textbook that contained a 60 page section on Japan’s occupation of Korea (1910-1945) and Japan’s invasion of Manchuria and China (1931-1945), which contained a detailed discussion of the comfort women issue. The September 2001 U.N. Human Rights Commission recommendation to Japan, cited above, also called on Japan to ensure that school textbooks and other teaching materials present history in “a fair balanced manner.”

Comfort Women Suits in Japanese and U.S. Courts

Since the three Korean women filed suit in a Japanese court in 1991, women claiming to be former comfort women have filed suit several times in Japanese courts. With the exception of one victory in a lower court in 1998, Japanese courts have rejected claims for Japanese government financial compensation, citing Japanese reparations agreements with several Asian governments, concluded in accord with the Treaty of Peace with Japan of 1951, and the South Korea-Japan Basic Treaty of 1965. The Treaty of Peace mandated that Japan enter into reparations agreements with Allied countries, whose territories were occupied by Japan, and it stated that “except as otherwise provided in the present Treaty, the Allied Powers waive all reparations claims of the Allied Powers, other claims of the Allied Powers and their nationals arising out of any actions taken by Japan and its nationals in the course of the prosecution of the war.” The South Korea-Japan Basic Treaty of 1965 stated that “rights and interests of the people of both contracting countries and other claims of both countries are solved completely and finally.”⁵⁶ However, reports by the United Nations and by Amnesty International in 2005 have called for the Japanese government to provide direct compensation to former comfort women. Moreover, some advocates for individual claimants from Allied countries have cited an exchange of letters between the Japanese and Dutch governments in 1951 in which Japan asserted that the Peace Treaty did not negate private claims against Japan by Dutch nationals.⁵⁷

In September 2000, 15 former comfort women from China, Taiwan, South Korea, and the Philippines filed a lawsuit in the U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C., seeking claims (including claims for financial compensation) against the Japanese government under the U.S. Alien Tort Statute. The case was titled *Joo vs. Japan*. The District Court and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia ruled against the women. The courts accepted the argument of the U.S. Executive Branch, filed in a third party brief, that the Executive Branch rather than the U.S. courts had jurisdiction over the “political question” of whether individual claims against Japan were valid in view of the provisions of the Japanese Peace Treaty of 1951. In July 2004, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Court of Appeals must reconsider the case. In June 2005, the Court of Appeals

⁵⁵ McCurry, Justin. Discomfort women. *British Guardian.*, June 14, 2005.

⁵⁶ Japanese court dismisses compensation demand by South Korean women. *Kyodo New Agency*, March 26, 2001. Settle past carefully with Japan. *Joongang Ilbo* (Seoul), March 4, 2005. P. 7.

⁵⁷ Clemons, Steven C. U.S. role in Japan’s amnesia. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 25, 2001. P. 32.

affirmed the original District Court judgment. The case went back to the Supreme Court, which ruled on February 21, 2006, that the claims of the women constituted non-judicial “political questions” and that the Supreme Court deferred to the judgment of the U.S. Executive Branch that the acceptance of such claims by U.S. courts would impinge upon the President’s ability to conduct foreign relations.⁵⁸

Conclusions

There is little question that, since 1992, the Government of Japan has acknowledged fully the role of the Japanese military and government in establishing and operating the comfort women system before and during World War II. However, even before Prime Minister Abe’s controversial statements of March 2007, the persuasiveness of the acknowledgments has been weakened in the eyes of many by related controversies over Japan’s historic record, such as the Prime Minister Koizumi’s visits to the Yasakuni shrine (where Japan’s war dead are enshrined but also where 14 major convicted war criminals also are enshrined), the content of history textbooks, and statements by individual Japanese political leaders such as the statement of the Minister of Education quoted above. The battle over acknowledgment continues in Japan today with the content of history textbooks as a main battleground; and some maintain that the trend toward textbooks omitting discussion of the comfort women system raises doubts about the commitment of Japan’s Prime Ministers in their letters to comfort women that Japan “should face up squarely to its past history and accurately convey it to future generations.”

The comfort women issue is part of a broader debate in Japan over how Japanese should view Japan’s record during the 1930s and World War II. History revisionists in Japan, as represented by the LDP Committee to Consider Japan’s Future Historical Education, appears to seek to absolve Japan from major guilt for its conduct during this period. Opponents of the history revisionists argue that Japan should acknowledge the negative aspects of its record and teach these to future generations in Japan. A recent example of this struggle, involving another historical issue, was the ruling of the Japanese Ministry of Education to delete passages from high school history textbooks that described the role of the Japanese army in the mass suicides of thousands of Okinawans during the Battle of Okinawa (April-June 1945).⁵⁹

The Asian Women’s Fund appears to have been a genuine effort by the Japanese government and the Fund’s sponsors and leaders to compensate and assist former comfort women. As discussed, several governments appeared to have accepted this by cooperating with the Asian Women’s Fund.

The controversial issue of Asian Women’s Fund atonement payments vs. demands for official Japanese government monetary compensation is predominately an issue of legal arguments vs. moral arguments. The Japanese government appears to have a credible legal position based on the Japanese Peace Treaty, Japan’s reparations

⁵⁸ Summary of the case from U.S. Law Week, provided by The American Law Division, Congressional Research Service, April 5, 2006. Washington Coalition for Comfort Women Issues. Chronology of Date and Events. (At www.comfort-women.org/v2/history.html).

⁵⁹ Onishi, Norimitsu. Japan’s textbooks reflect revised history. New York Times, April 1, 2007. P. 12.

agreements with several countries, and the language of the South Korea-Japan normalization treaty of 1965. The February 2006 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Joo vs. Japan* seems to add strength to the Japanese government's position. However, demands for official compensation have a strong moral component; even some defenders of the Asian Women's Fund argue that Japan could have followed Germany's example and set up additional private-government combined funds to compensate other abused groups like forced laborers and prisoners of war. Japan has indicated concern that official compensation to comfort women could open up a Pandora's box of claims from other abused groups. This possibility opens up a number of uncertainties, including the potential for Japanese to counter by demanding official U.S. compensation for the U.S. napalm bombings of Japanese cities in 1945 (beginning with the massive Tokyo fire raid of March 9, 1945, which killed an estimated 80,000 or more Japanese) and the atomic bombings of August 1945.

The Japanese government cites two statements as official apologies to comfort women: Cabinet Secretary Kono's statement of August 1993 and the Prime Ministers' letters to former comfort women who accepted assistance from the Asian Women's Fund. The Prime Ministers' letters state that the Prime Minister is speaking in the letters "as Prime Minister of Japan." The letters, all of which are identical in language, use the words "apology" and "apologies" and addresses these to all comfort women rather than just the recipients of the letters. Critics state that these are inadequate, but they have not detailed their reasons for considering the statements inadequate. Some critics have suggested a resolution by the Japanese Diet as a suitable mode of apology, but the prospects of the full Diet approving such a resolution appear remote.

Some of Prime Minister Abe's statements in March 2007, including his reaffirmation of the Kono Statement and the Prime Minister's letters, continue this tone of acknowledgment and apology. However, other statements appear to contradict elements of the Kono Statement and the Prime Minister's letters. His emphasis on one component of the comfort women system, recruitment, has the effect of minimizing the Japanese military's deep role in other aspects of the system (transport, establishment and administration of comfort stations, and control of the women at the comfort stations). The military may not have directly carried out the majority of recruitment, especially in Korea; but the Abe government's denial of any evidence of military coercion in recruitment goes against the testimony former comfort women to Japanese government researchers who compiled the 1992-1993 government report and the testimony of forced recruitment by nearly 200 former comfort women from different Asian countries and the Netherlands of the 400 plus testimonies cited in Yuki Tanaka's book, *Japan's Comfort Women*.

The credibility of these women's testimony appears to be a major point of contention between the Abe government and the LDP's Committee to Consider Japan's Future and Historical Education, on the one hand, and the Kono Statement and the Japanese government's report of 1992-1993, on the other hand. The Kono Statement and the government's report were based partly on the testimony of former comfort women. Kono Yohei, current Speaker of the Diet's House of Representatives, stated on March 30, 2007, that his 1993 statement was based on government interviews with 16 former comfort women, who "offered explanation after explanation on a situation known only to

those who had experienced such tremendous hardships.”⁶⁰ On the opposite side, the statements by the Abe government, including the March 16, 2007, Cabinet statement and spokesmen for the Committee to Consider Japan’s Future Historical Education that there is no evidence of coercion seem to reject such testimony as credible evidence. As stated earlier, Prime Minister Abe reportedly would not comment when asked by a member of the Diet whether he considered credible the testimony of former comfort women.⁶¹ The Abe government and the Committee to Consider Japan’s Future Historical Education seem to base their position largely on the situation in Korea where it appears that the majority of the recruitment of comfort women seemed to have been done by civilian recruiters who used deception and pressure on families rather than physical coercion—although some former comfort women claim to have been physically abducted. Moreover, the contention that there is no evidence of forcible, coerced recruitment seems to either ignore or be a rejection of the findings of the Dutch War Crimes Tribunals’ findings and verdicts (including three death penalties) against seven Japanese army officers and four civilian employees of the army for coerced prostitution and rape of Dutch and other women in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia). This raises the potentially very important question of whether the Abe government is repudiation of Article 11 of the 1951 Treaty of Peace between the Allied powers and Japan. Article 11 states: “Japan accepts the judgments of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East and of other Allied War Crimes Courts both within and outside Japan. . . .”

Another apparent consequence of the rejection of the comfort women’s testimony is the erosion of support from outside Japan for the Japanese government’s demand that North Korea account for its kidnapping of Japanese citizens since the 1970s. This was pointed up by the *Washington Post* editorial of March 24, 2007, “Shinzo Abe’s Double Talk,” which contrasted Prime Minister Abe insistence on North Korean accountability for the kidnapping with “his parallel campaign to roll back Japan’s acceptance and responsibility for the abduction, rape, and sexual enslavement of tens of thousands of women during World War II.” The editorial asserted: “If Mr. Abe seeks international support in learning the fate of Japan’s kidnapped citizens, he should straightforwardly accept responsibility for Japan own crimes—and apologize to the victims he has slandered.” Thus, in rejecting the testimony of over 100 former comfort women, the Japanese government appears to be putting itself in a position in which outsiders could begin to question the credibility of the claims that North Korea has kidnapped Japanese citizens.

The Prime Minister’s contradictory statements appear aimed at placating if not supporting the LDP Committee to Consider Japan’s Future Historical Education, who wish to amend or remove the Kono Statement and probably absolve the Japanese military from any responsibility for the comfort women system. The study, which these Dietmen have announced, and the reactions to it by the Japanese media and the public will be important indicators of the historical revisionists influence in Japan now and in the future.

⁶⁰Kono criticizes calls for review of his statement as ‘not in good faith.’ *Mainichi Shimbun*, March 30, 2007. P. 2

⁶¹Onishi, Norimitsu. Japan leader who denied state role in wartime sex slavery still apologizes. *New York Times*, March 27, 2007. P. A7.

An overlooked issue in much of the discussion of comfort women is whether former comfort women in allied and occupied countries had adequate freedom to decide whether to accept compensation and/or assistance from the Asian Women's Fund. It appears that they did have sufficient freedom in the Philippines, Indonesia, and the Netherlands but that they were discouraged in Taiwan and intimidated in South Korea not to accept assistance from the Asian Women's Fund. Despite the financial generosity of the South Korean government's own fund for former comfort women, the South Korean government and NGOs used it and other means as instruments of pressure and intimidation against Korean women who otherwise would have sought assistance from the Asian Women's Fund in 1997. South Korean press reports on the comfort women issue often denigrate the Asian Women's Fund by asserting that only a "small number" of women came forward to accept the Fund's assistance because most former comfort women rejected the Fund because of its "unofficial" status.⁶² The press as well as the South Korean government continue to avoid acknowledging South Korea's intimidation of its own comfort women in the episode of 1997.

Finally, the records of the Asian Women's Fund and the government funds in South Korea and Taiwan suggest that no program of compensation/assistance likely would have drawn responses from former comfort women much beyond the approximately 500 that came forward in response to these funds. It appears that the social stigma of revealing one's past as a former comfort woman remained a deterrent to many women who could have stepped forward.

⁶²As examples, see Colonial documents show Japan's official involvement in comfort women: scholar. Yonhap News Agency, March 6, 2007; and Lee Joo-hee. Pressure mounts on sex slave issue. Korea Herald (internet version), March 10, 2007.