

Appeal Concerning Japan's military "comfort women"

By Center for Research and Documentation on Japan's War Responsibility

H.Res. 121 on Japan's military "comfort women" is currently being processed in the U.S. House of Representatives. Meanwhile, Japanese government officials and members of the ruling LDP, including Aso Taro, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, are raising their voices to deny basic, well-established historical facts regarding the "comfort women" issue.

If we allow the Japanese government to quash this resolution, the result will be not only a distorted view of historical fact, but also a discrediting of the Japanese people as a whole in the eyes of the international community. The resolution's co-sponsors in Congress hope that, by promoting a lasting solution to the "comfort woman" issue, the resolution will have a positive influence on East Asian relations, helping to secure peace in the region.

Based on concern over the activities of the government and ruling party of Japan as described above, we reiterate the following facts, already well-established, and request that the government of Japan and its associates take appropriate action.

1) Many official documents concerning Japan's "comfort women" system, including those of the Army, Navy and other governmental agencies, have already been disclosed. The facts documented in these materials are as follows: The former Japanese Army and Navy created the "comfort women" system to serve their own needs. The military decided when, where, and how "comfort stations" were to be established, and implemented these decisions, providing buildings, setting regulations and fees, and controlling the management of "comfort stations." The military was well aware of the various methods used to bring women to "comfort stations" and of the circumstances these women were forced to endure.

2) Some have argued that, because the term *jugun ianfu* (literally, military-accompanying comfort women) was not used prior to the end of World War II, the entire "comfort women" phenomenon is a myth. However, military documents of the time refer to *ianfu*

(comfort women), gun ianjo jugyo-fu (women working at military comfort stations), and gun ianjo (military comfort stations). Therefore, it is not inaccurate to refer to women confined in “comfort stations” set up for the Japanese troops as jugun ianfu or Nihon-gun ianfu (the Japanese military’s “comfort women”).

3) Among those who were made “comfort women” serving Japanese troops, women from Korea and Taiwan, both under Japanese colonial rule at the time, were bought and sold, or deceived, and removed from their own countries to be used in “comfort stations” against their will. These acts constituted crimes of human trafficking and abduction, as well as crimes of abduction overseas and transfer across international borders as specified in the Criminal Code of the time. While these acts were mainly carried out by private procurers assigned by the Government-Generals of the colonies or by the military, it is reasonable to assume that the military authorities, who set up “comfort stations” in the areas they occupied were well aware of the fact that some of these women were procured through trafficking and abduction.

4) Among those who were made “comfort women” for Japanese forces, in addition to trafficking of women from China, South East Asia and the Pacific region (including Dutch women detained in Indonesia), there were also cases in which local leaders offered some women to the Japanese troops in order to save other members of their communities, and of Japanese military or officials abducting women by force or through deception. These women were confined in “comfort stations,” where they were forced to provide sex to the troops. It is impossible to believe that the military authorities that set up “comfort stations” in areas under their occupation were unaware of these facts.

5) A significant percentage of those who were made “comfort women” for the Japanese troops were minors. In light of the international agreements concerning the prohibition of trafficking in women and children that Japan was party to at the time, it can hardly be claimed that the servitude of under age girls in “comfort stations” was a matter of their own free will.

6) Japan’s military “comfort women” system did not have the freedom to quit, to change or choose their residence, or even to leave temporarily. Women confined in “comfort stations” were

denied even the extremely limited freedoms given to licensed prostitutes in Japan. Women transported to areas under Japanese occupation far from their homes found escape utterly impossible, as all transportation routes were under Japanese military control. Japan's military "comfort women" system was literally sexual slavery in a thorough and overt form.

7) Today, the issue of "coercion" is sometimes interpreted in a very narrow sense, referring only to violent abduction of victimized women by police or government officials to deny that "coercion" took place. This is an instance of tunnel vision, in which crimes such as trafficking, abduction overseas and transfer across international borders through deception are ignored. Those who hold this narrow view refuse to acknowledge the fact that the actions of private agents involved, as well as the transportation of the women, were actually carried out under the control of the Japanese military or police. We would also like to point out that the miserable lives these women were forced to lead in "comfort stations" often ended in premature death, either by disease, being caught in the cross fire, or through suicide, including "love-pact suicides" in which women were murdered by desperate soldiers who did not want to die alone.

8) The government of Japan claims that it has already apologized to the "comfort women". It is true that each of the women who accepted "atonement money" from the Asian Women's Fund received, along with the money, a copy of a letter signed by the Prime Minister which reads: "As Prime Minister of Japan, I thus extend anew my most sincere apologies and remorse". This letter, however, accepts only Japan's "moral responsibility", while rejecting legal responsibility and liability to provide compensation. The Japanese government uses the term "moral responsibility" in a relatively light sense, which implicitly denies any legal responsibility.

9) The "letter from the Prime Minister" described above also states: "I believe 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." Nevertheless, explicit references to "comfort women", once included in all junior high school history textbooks, have now been totally eliminated. While the history textbooks were being

revised, the former Minister of Education and Science stated that he was “very glad” to see that fewer textbooks referred to the “comfort women” issue. Moreover, it is well known that a significant number of politicians now holding important posts in the government and LDP, including Prime Minister Abe himself, actively supported the movement to delete references to “comfort women” from history textbooks, or to discourage the use in schools of the few textbooks that still included such references. Although Abe has toned down his stance since becoming Prime Minister, members of his cabinet continue their efforts to deny the existence of the “comfort women” system. Thus the government of Japan has failed to keep even the promise it voluntarily made in the “letter from the Prime Minister”.

We strongly hope that the world will acknowledge the facts listed above, and that the “comfort women” issue will soon be fundamentally and finally resolved.

This is a slightly abbreviated version of a statement issued 23 February 2007.

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