

23 February, 2007

## Appeal on the issue of Japan's military "comfort women"

In the United States, the resolution bill on the issue of Japan's military "comfort women" (H.Res.121) is currently being processed in the 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. The Japanese government spent as much as \$60,000 per month to hire lobbyists in order to influence Congressional discussion on a similar resolution in the fall of 2006. This was widely reported in the international media.

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 our concern over the activities of the government and ruling party of Japan as described above, we hereby re-iterate 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 argue today that, because before and during World War II the term *jugun ianfu* (literally, military-accompanying comfort women) did not exist, the entire "comfort women" phenomenon is a myth. However, terms used in military

documentation of the time include *ianfu* (comfort women), *gun ianjo jugyo-fu* (women working at military comfort stations), and *gun ianjo* (military comfort stations). Therefore, referring 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”) is in no way inaccurate, however problematic the term “comfort woman” may be in and of itself.

3) Among those who were made “comfort women” for the Japanese troops, women from Korea and Taiwan, both under the 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 the crimes of human trafficking and abduction, as well as the crimes of abduction overseas and transfer across international borders as provided 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 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 the Japanese troops, the cases of women from China, South East Asia and the Pacific region (including Dutch women detained in Indonesia) involved not only trafficking, but also cases in which local leaders offered certain women to the Japanese troops in order to save other female members of their communities, and of the Japanese military or officials under their control abducting women by force or through deception. These women were finally confined in “comfort stations,” where they were forced to provide sex to the troops against their will. It is impossible to believe that the military authorities that set up “comfort stations” in areas under their occupation were not aware 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) Scholars have convincingly shown that the system of licensed prostitution that existed in Japan until 1946 was a system of sexual slavery with trafficking and restriction of freedom as its crucial elements. Licensed prostitutes had no freedom to choose or change their residences. Although provided under law with the freedom to leave the vicinity temporarily or to quit altogether, the women were often kept in ignorance of this fact. Those aware of their rights often faced violent opposition when

they tried to exercise them. In rare cases in which a woman was able to bring her case to court, the judgment would require her to pay off her debt to her procurer, making it virtually impossible to escape the degrading and inhuman cycle of licensed prostitution.

7) Japan's military "comfort women" system did not provide women with the freedom to quit, to change or choose their residence, or even to leave the vicinity 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. While licensed prostitution in Japan may be called a *de facto* system of sexual slavery, Japan's military "comfort women" system was literally sexual slavery, in a far more thorough and overt form.

8) Today, the issue of "coercion" is sometimes interpreted in a very narrow sense, as referring only to violent abduction of victimized women by police or government officials, and claim that such "coercion" did not take 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 also refuse to accept 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.

9) 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 of Japan at the time 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 as a prerequisite. The Japanese government uses the term "moral responsibility" in a relatively light sense, which implicitly denies any legal responsibility. Some women survivors who initially received this "letter from the Prime Minister" have come to realize that it is a mere token apology, and returned their letters to the Japanese Embassy in their locale.

10) The "letter from the Prime Minister" described above also states as follows: "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 have references to “comfort women” deleted 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.

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