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JAPAN'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE "MILITARY COMFORT WOMEN"

The "Military Comfort Women" (a.k.a., "Jungshindae" or "Wianbu") system was a brainchild of the Japanese military. The exact date for the introduction of the system is unclear. A few researchers traced the record as far back as 1932. However, many historians regard 1937 as a turning point around which time the Japanese military started to set up military comfort houses systematically in large number. This was because Japan started a full-scale war against China in 1937 and about 800,000 Japanese soldiers poured into China. As Japanese soldiers committed massive rapes between battles in Shanghai and Nanjing, comfort houses were set up as a preventive measure against rapes. Other reasons for the establishment of the comfort houses were to prevent spread of VD and to keep Japanese soldiers happy at the battlefronts for a long period of time.

The military comfort houses were initially managed by the Japanese Army's Recreation Division. However, due to the negative reaction of the public, many were later handed over to Japanese civilian agents under the direct supervision of the military. So far, documents show that these comfort houses were set up in China, Hong Kong, Indochina, Phillippines, Malaya, Singapore, Borneo, Java, Burma, Okinawa, Guam and other Pacific Islands wherever a large number of Japanese troops were stationed during the War.

The Japanese military recruited the comfort women from the occupied areas or from distant colonies by means of force, coercion or deception. The comfort women included Koreans, Taiwanese, Chinese, Philipinas, Indonesians and even Dutch. The majority of them were Koreans. Their age ranged from 12 to 35 and most of them were confined at the comfort stations until the end of the War in 1945. They had to serve an average of 30/40 soldiers a day and sometimes 100 a day on the weekend. They were treated like captive animals and many were beaten, tortured or killed by the Japanese soldiers or the comfort station masters. Some died on the battlefields or committed suicide.

One former Japanese official, Seiji Yoshida, confessed openly that he led a group of policemen in 1943 and 1944 to seize about 2,000 Korean women to be sent away as comfort women. No one knows the exact number of the comfort women, but it is estimated that about 200,000 women were forced into the military sexual service.

Due to the mounting evidence and open testimony of the surviving victims, the Japanese government finally admitted on August 4, 1993 that many comfort women "were recruited against their own will,....and that, at times, administrative/military personnel directly took part in the recruitments." This is a significant victory for the comfort women and their support groups since this is the first time the Japanese government confessed its direct involve-

ment. In short, this is tentamount to their admission that they committed war crimes and/or crimes against humanity, as defined under the Charter of International Military Tribunal of Nuremberg, which include "enslavement... and other inhumane acts committed against any civilian population."

Neverthless, the Japanese government is still reluctant in disclosing all government documents on the comfort women issue and still refusing to pay any compensation to the women victims--maintaining its old position that all wartime claims were settled when Japan signed normalization treaties with Korea and other Asian nations. This kind of official attitude shows how irresponsible and evasive they are on the comfort women issue. They are either blind or deliberately ignoring the fact that the comfort women issue was not known and never discussed at the time the treaties were negotiated. Besides, the comfort women never delegated or waived their right to compensation, and thus the treaty is void to the extent that the individual claims were allegedly settled by the treaty.

To achieve full justice for the comfort women victims, the Korean American Coalition on Jungshindae(KACJ) has been waging a public campaign in the US since September 1992. We have collected thousands of signatures on behalf of the comfort women which were sent to the UN, and also held demonstrations in front of the UN. We are asking the world community to reject Japan's bid to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council until it has fulfilled its legal and moral obligations to the comfort women and other wartime victims.

If Japan is sincere, she should learn from what other countries have done to redress the suffering of the wartime victims. Germany has been paying out more than 60 billion dollars to the Nazi victims and prosecuted thousands of war criminals. Even the United Kingdom enacted War Crimes Act in 1991 and Australia in 1990 to punish Nazi war criminals. In 1988 the US Congress also passed a special law to offer a formal apology and compensation to the Japanese Americans who were interned in the concentration camps during World War II. Why is Japan alone so irresponsible about its past war crimes?

Unfortunately, the US also bears a heavy responsibility for the current attitude of the Japanese government. Because of the cold war, the US shortened the Tokyo Military Trial by focusing on the war crimes committed against civilians of the US and European countries--ignoring deliberately the vast war crimes committed against Asian people. Notorious Japanese war criminals were left untouched and allowed to emerge as leading members of the Japanese society after the War. No war criminals have been prosecuted by the Japanese government since the end of the Tokyo Trial--nor did she pay any individual compensations to the wartime victims.

Mere apology from the Japanese government is so inadequate and insincere that it is unacceptable to redress the gross suffering of the comfort women and other wartime victims. Therefore, KACJ demands that Japan must carry out at least the following six measures immediately:

1) Conduct a thorough search of all government documents on the comfort

women issue and make them available to the public.

2) The Emperor and Parliament should offer sincere apology to the comfort women victims.

3) The Parliament should pass a special law to pay just compensation to the comfort women victims.

4) All school textbooks should be revised to teach students the full truth about Japan's past war crimes.

5) Build a memorial monument and museum for the comfort women and other wartime victims.

6) Prosecute the war criminals responsible for the military sexual slavery and other horrendous war crimes or crimes against humanity.

Detach here & return to KACJ

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*KACJ is a non-profit, volunteer, human rights organization of Korean-Americans and other concerned Americans, residing in the greater New York area, who are united in support of the international movement to redress the pain and suffering of the military comfort women who were forced into military sexual slavery by Japan during WW II.