

16 Japanese Barred From Entering U.S.

WATCH LIST, From A1

from Korea, China, Taiwan, the Netherlands, Philippines, Malaysia, Burma and what is now Indonesia were tortured and repeatedly raped by Japanese officers and soldiers.

In Tokyo, Foreign Ministry spokesman Hiroshi Hashimoto said the Japanese government was not aware of the Justice Department action. He said government officials would contact the Justice Department to "analyze what this means."

"This is a new experience for us," the Japanese spokesman said. "When we have a new experience it takes rather a long time for us to assess it and determine what our position will be."

However, State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said here that the Justice Department alerted the department "many months ago" about the war crimes investigation and "we gave the Japanese ample warning."

Some observers in Japan said they were surprised that the U.S. government was raising these issues more than 50 years after the war. They said that highlighting the "comfort women" issue seemed particularly surprising, because Japan has issued formal apologies to many women and paid damages in some cases.

"Until now, this has not been a problem between the United States and Japan. I can't imagine why the United States government would do this now, it's very serious," said Masao Okonogi, a professor of political science at Keio University in Tokyo.

In the United States, Johns Hopkins University professor Nathaniel Thayer, an expert in Japanese history and politics, noted that the United States has not joined China, Korea and other Asian nations in complaining that Tokyo has "not shown proper atonement" for World War II atrocities.

"We said we settled our issues at the Tokyo War Crime Trials," convened in 1946 to prosecute Japanese soldiers and leaders suspected of atrocities during World War II, Thayer said. "This opens it up again."

But Dongwoo Lee Hahn, president of the Washington Coalition for Comfort Women Issues Inc., said, "It's an exciting moment. These issues have never been properly addressed."

The Justice Department declined to make public the names of the banned individuals. Rosenbaum said in a telephone interview that the department has traditionally not identified persons on the watch list because it wants to

create a fear factor. If people don't know who is on the list, they may not want to attempt to enter the United States, even those who are not listed, he said.

A number of scholars yesterday described the Justice Department's action as late and questionable given what is known about the U.S. government's own actions at the end of the war.

"This seems to me remarkably hypocritical," said John Dower, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor and specialist on modern Japanese history and U.S. relations. "At the end of World War II the U.S. occupying force was aware of the information about Unit 731 but deliberately exonerated the men in return for their agreement to be debriefed on the findings of their atrocious experiments. We agreed to cover up their crimes."

Rosenbaum said he could not challenge such assertions. "The top leaders of Unit 731 are no longer alive," he said. "Clearly they deserved trial and the most severe punishment. But the failure to prosecute them can't be undone. The Justice Department continues to investigate."

Rosenbaum also said until recently the inquiry had been hampered by limited records and eyewitness accounts about activities of the Japanese Imperial Army. For example, there has traditionally been no Asian counterparts to a number of research institutions in the United States and Europe such as the National Archives, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Imperial War Museum in London.

Increased documentation and testimony recently made available have made it possible to conclusively identify specific Japanese suspects, a key for Justice Department action.

"This is far more difficult research than for the European theater of World War II," Rosenbaum said. "We owe a debt to the international human rights community and academics who recently produced records for us to examine."

Since the OSI was created in 1979, more than 60,000 persons have been placed on the watch list. More than 100 suspected participants in Nazi-sponsored persecution in wartime Europe have been identified trying to enter the United States since 1989, and prevented from doing so.

Created by Congress to address concerns that thousands of ex-Nazis had slipped into the United States, the office at times has been the source of controversy, with a small band of Capitol Hill critics charging that the unit has been on a campaign of persecution against aged Americans of European descent.

Correspondents Mary Jordan and Kevin Sullivan in Tokyo and staff writer Thomas W. Lippman in Washington contributed to this report.