

JUNGSHINDAE & SEXUAL SLAVERY

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The issue of a government policy encouraging rape and sexual abuse of women is evident in Bosnia today. This issue is a poignant and emotional one which has long, sad roots, including an especially abhorrent and tragic yet still little known history in the period of World War II in the Pacific. This is the policy by which the Imperial Japanese government forced the estimated 80,000 to 200,000 Korean and other women into Japanese military brothels to serve as sexual slaves during WW II. In Korea they are called "Jungshindae."

As a result of a growing movement for women's rights, concerned South Korean women formed a formal group called the "Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Sexual Slavery by Japan" in November 1990 to study and redress the emotional and politically volatile issue. The group opened a hotline, and located many surviving elderly South Korean women who set aside their embarrassment and came forward to reveal their hidden history. Some of these women even went to Japan to file legal actions against the Japanese government.

Their testimony shows that Japanese officials — usually policemen — rounded up young Korean women by force or deceit and sent them to various Japanese military camps in Japan, Manchuria, China, Burma, and Southeastern Islands. Many women were drafted to work in military industries and then forced into sexual slavery. Once these young women, some as young as 13 years old, arrived at the military camps, Japanese officers first raped and then sent them into a local military brothel. Soldiers guarded their escape, and the women were forced to serve 30 to 60 soldiers a day on average and sometimes more. The hapless women were abused to exhaustion and many died of physical abuse or venereal disease. Unable to bear the stress, many women committed suicide or suffered mental breakdown. When WW II ended, the departing Japanese troops often killed or abandoned the women.

The modern Japanese government initially denied historical involvement in running military brothels. Later, under an overwhelming avalanche of damning evidence, the Japanese government admitted complicity. Public testimony by many surviving Asian women, Japanese soldiers and policemen who were directly involved in the criminal process of kidnapping or drafting young Korean women as "comfort women," as well as the discovery of official documents

linking the Japanese military government to the wartime crime, forced the Japanese government to admit on July 6, 1992 that "its military had organized tens of thousands of women in a vast network of Government-run brothels for Japanese soldiers during WW II." (*The New York Times*, July 7, 1992)

However, the present Japanese government still refuses to admit the kidnapping/draft charges or to pay any formal compensation to the surviving victims. It takes the position that all indemnity was settled after the war, when Japan provided economic assistance to South Korea, China, and other Asian countries. This callous position is absurd and unfortunate since the issue of sex slavery was never mentioned or discussed at the time when the normalization of diplomatic relations occurred.

In order to find redress for surviving victims, a full UN investigation on the subject is called for, no matter how unpleasant it may be.

The courageous efforts of the elderly surviving victims of the sex slavery by Japan's wartime government deserve strong support from the people of the world, including the international community at the UN. Unless there is an international tribunal on the issue and an open condemnation of Japan's brutal policies and actions which violated the lives of tens of thousands of women, other governments may be inclined to repeat this kind of crime against humanity.

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