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Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination
and Protection of Minorities
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Item 4

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Commission of the Churches on International Affairs
Oral intervention by the World Council of Churches

ITEM 4: COMPENSATION FOR VICTIMS OF GROSS VIOLATION OF
HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Chairperson,

The World Council of Churches thanks the Sub-Commission for this opportunity to intervene once again, concerning the grave issue of the so-called "Comfort Women", namely the sex slavery forced on a vast number of Korean young women by Japan. Ms. Keum-Ju Hwang, also present here, is a surviving victim of this terrible violation of human rights.

Earlier testimony by the World Council of Churches, International Educational Development, Inc. and other NGO's has detailed this unprecedented crime against women and humanity itself committed by a state.

The World Council of Churches appreciates this Sub-Commission's resolution, requesting the Secretary-General to submit to the Special Rapporteur all the information on the situation of women who were forced to engage in prostitution during wartime (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1992/L.3).

Recognized as victims of gross violation of human rights and freedom, sex slavery victims are entitled to the right to restitution, compensation and rehabilitation in the report of the Special Rapporteur on this subject. The World Council of Churches strongly supports the demands of the Korean Council for Women Drafted for Sex Slavery by Japan upon the Japanese government in order to remedy the damages effectively.

The Korean Council, organized by the leaders of the women's movement in the Republic of Korea in November 1990, is demanding from the Japanese government an appropriate solution for such a gross violation of human rights, in accordance with the international convention. Their first and major demand is for a thorough investigation and admission of the involvement of the Japanese military and the government's responsibility. It was as late as this January, after half a century, that Japan first admitted the involvement of its government, when the crucial government documents were discovered and exposed by a university professor. As a result, on July 6 this year, the Japanese government made public a preliminary report of their investigation, officially recognizing its systematic involvement for the first time.

Unfortunately, however, the government report has entirely bypassed the witness and experiences of the surviving victims as well as various research findings and relevant evidence published by private researchers and investigating groups. They wrongly insist that there is no evidence of coercion in the drafting of these "Comfort Women." Moreover, ^{the} Japanese ^{representative} ~~ambassador Ito~~, in his right of reply of August 10 at this Sub-Commission, reiterated ~~that~~ his government has no legal responsibility for compensation. He said, 'Apart from such legal issues, the government of Japan will consider, in deepest sincerity, how best we can embody our feelings towards those who underwent such pains and sufferings...'

Mr. Chairperson, the Japanese claims that the compensation issue is already solved by the 1965 agreement pact between the Republic of Korea and Japan is in error. The injustice of such Japanese claims was already argued in the statement of IED presented on item 16 on August 7. The World Council of Churches is in full agreement with the position taken by IED: That is, that the Japanese government's act of forcing sex slavery on Korean young women constitutes a crime against humanity, a violation of freedom from slavery and a violation of the Forced Labor Convention ratified by Japan in 1932.

Mr. Chairperson, the World Council of Churches wishes to raise another aspect of this grave violation of human rights. Many of the Korean girls and women were drafted also as labourers, who were forced to work for military industries. The testimony of the sex slavery victims has revealed that they had been drafted under "mobilization order for labor" for the military industries. Ms. Hwang, who is here, is one such example. Many girls as young as 12-13 years old were drafted, either from public schools or from district offices throughout the nation, and sent to the factories. The full scale of such mobilization has never been estimated. Among these young girls drafted for labor, many of them were then also forced into sex slavery. Most of the Japanese companies required their small wages to be deposited with the company in order to prevent them from escaping. Such forced savings were never returned to these girls, while the records of their savings are still kept by many of these companies. The Japanese government claims that individual's right to claim these savings was nullified by the 1965 Korea-Japan Agreement.

Regarding these gross violations of human rights of the victims of sex slavery and forced labor, the World Council of Churches requests of this Sub-Commission the following:

1. To urge the Japanese government to investigate thoroughly these gross violations of human rights;
2. To urge the Japanese government and other relevant governments to submit all the relevant information to the Special Rapporteur on the right to restitution, compensation, and rehabilitation of the victims of the gross violation of human rights;

3. To urge the Japanese government to admit its legal responsibility and pay full compensation to each of the victims and their families; and
4. To urge the Japanese government to require involved Japanese companies to appropriately remunerate Korean women workers whose wages and savings were retained by order of the government.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairperson.