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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
THE 50TH SESSION
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REPORT OF THE SUB-COMMISSION ON PREVENTION OF DISCRIMINATION
AND PROTECTION OF MINORITIES ON ITS FORTY-FIFTH SESSION

Oral Intervention by: HEISOO SHIN,
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The World Council of Churches, representing more than 300 member churches world wide, welcomes this opportunity to make an oral intervention in this 50th Session of the Commission on Human Rights.

During the past two years, the World Council of Churches has been raising the issue of military sexual slavery by Japan, concerning some 200,000 Asian women who were forced to be the sexual slaves of the Japanese Imperial Army during wartime. Given the vast number of victims and the seriousness of the scope of human rights violations, the World Council of Churches brought the issue to the attention of the Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery and the Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities and also the 49th Session of the Commission on Human Rights. With several other NGOs concerned with this issue, the World Council of Churches appreciated the resolution of the 45th Session of the Sub-Commission to appoint Ms. Linda Chavez as Special Rapporteur on Slavery during Wartime including internal conflicts. This issue of slavery during wartime was also raised at the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, when the Committee reviewed Japan's national report on the 27-28 of January this year.

As the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and the international human rights community watched over Japan, the Japanese Government has made some progress, although not satisfactory, in their second report released on the 4th of August 1993, finally admitting that the Japanese Army was involved in forcible drafting of women into sexual slavery, and that the victims were put under intolerable agony and pain in their captivity. Right after his inauguration, Japanese Prime Minister Hosokawa acknowledged that the war Japan started was an aggressive war. In the Kyongju summit with President Kim Yong Sam of the Republic of Korea, Prime Minister Hosokawa apologized about the system of sexual slavery as well as the colonial rule over Korea as a whole.

This initial progress in the attitudes of the Japanese Government

and its new leader, however, has retreated over the last 5 months. The demands for justice and due reparation as a legal responsibility for the victims and organizations representing them have been ignored. Japan is still repeating the same statement that it is considering "what it can do to express its feelings of remorse," implying that it is thinking of some kind of fund in lieu of compensation.

The surviving victims, most of whom are in their 70s now, are getting desperate, with their health deteriorating. In 1993 alone, three victims in the Republic of Korea have died, including one woman who died of syphilis carried over the long years since the early days of her sexual slavery. The victims are demanding their honor be regained and their dignity as human beings being restored by bringing the criminals to justice and reparation being paid for their destroyed lives.

Just last Monday on February 7, eleven people from the Republic of Korea visited the Japanese Prosecutor's Office in Tokyo to file a formal complaint signed by 27 surviving victims, demanding punishment for those criminals responsible for planning, implementing and managing the system of military sexual slavery. The Japanese Prosecutor's Office, however, refused even to receive the complaint, which flatly shows that the Japanese Government does not admit that it was a criminal act.

Mr. Chairperson, violence against women has become a world wide concern, especially after we witnessed the massive organized rapes in the former Yugoslavia. In the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, it was stressed that all violations of women's human rights during armed conflicts require a particularly effective response. The World Council of Churches is glad that an international tribunal is being set up to punish the criminals. We also want you to pay attention to the fact that regarding the 35 Dutch women who were drawn to sexual slavery by the Japanese Army, the Batavia Military Court punished the Japanese military officers and even the private entrepreneurs. By contrast, there was no trial whatsoever on the criminals who committed war crimes and crimes against humanity against the vast number of Asian women.

At the present time, the German Government is still punishing the Nazi criminals and paying reparation to the victims. Also the United States Government has decided in 1988 to extend long-overdue official apologies and to pay compensation to surviving American citizens of Japanese descent who were wrongfully forced into internment camps during World War II.

Mr. Chairperson, the World Council of Churches requests that this Commission would not only approve the Sub-Commission's resolution 1993/24 to appoint Ms. Linda Chavez as Special Rapporteur on Slavery during Wartime, but also urge Japan to establish justice by punishing those who are responsible for the crimes and pay reparation to the victims.

In 1993, the government of Japan formally expressed its desire to be a member of the UN Security Council. For any discussion of the world peace, however, Japan needs first to resolve its past wrongdoing. Until Japan comes up with the long over-due punishment for the criminals and legal compensation for the victims, the lingering legacy from the past and the outcry of hundreds of thousands of Asian women victimized by Japan will haunt the nation of Japan.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

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