

Statement by Minister Yoshiki Mine
at the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination
and Protection of Minorities
on Item #6, Contemporary Forms of Slavery
Geneva, 14 August 1998

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Government of Japan has sincerely addressed and settled the issues relating to the war in accordance with the San Francisco Peace Treaty, bilateral peace treaties and other relevant international agreements.

Recognizing that the issue of the so-called "comfort women" was a serious affront to the honour and dignity of many women, the Government of Japan has been expressing its apologies and remorse to the former "comfort women" on many occasions and has been making great efforts on this issue in cooperation with Japanese people through the Asian Women's Fund (AWF).

In view of the fact that this Sub-Commission is now taking up this issue again, we would like to explain our policy briefly, highlighting the recent progress.

First, the number of people who received the Letter of apology and remorse from the Prime Minister of Japan has increased. More than 80 people have already received it.

Second, the number of people who have received the Atonement of 2 million Yen from the Japanese People has equally increased and more than 80 people have already received it.

Thirdly, Medical and Welfare Support Projects to be funded with the Governmental Resources

The Government of Japan decided to disburse approximately 700 million yen from the national budget for the medical and welfare projects of the AWF to the former

"comfort women" in the Republic of Korea, the Philippines and Taiwan over a 3-year period. The projects are being carried out with the actual circumstances of each of the former "comfort women" being taken fully into account.

Fourthly, Project in Indonesia

The AWF has decided to support the project proposed by the Government of Indonesia, which is called the "Promotion of Social Welfare Services for Elderly People in Indonesia". In March 1997, the AWF concluded the Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Indonesia to provide financial support (380 million yen over 10 years) making use of a fund disbursed by the Government of Japan to the project. According to this project, the construction of the first five facilities, which are for the elderly who have no family or relatives to look after them and are unable to work due to illness or physical handicaps, has been already completed.

Fifthly, Project in the Netherlands

Last month, the AWF concluded Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Project Implementation Committee in the Netherlands (PICN) on a project, concerning "comfort women" issue, which aims to help enhance the living conditions of those who suffered physical and psychological wounds during World War II. In accordance with the MOU, the AWF shall provide the PICN for the financial support disbursed by the Government of Japan totaling up to 255 million yen over 3 years.

In other areas, the Government of Japan is providing financial contributions to the AWF for its activities toward the solution of such contemporary women's issues, for instance, in organizing international forums, supporting the activities of NGOs engaged in various contemporary issues on women. The AWF also, as a pillar of its activities, has set up a sub-committee of historians, other experts and members of the AWF to gather documents and materials related to the issue of "comfort women".

In the Field of Education, now, junior and senior high school textbooks have references to this issue. This is more or less a reminder.

With respect to the final report on systematic rape, sexual slavery and slavery-like practices during armed conflict submitted by Special Rapporteur, the Japanese Government finds the overall report quite a valuable study. In the appendix to this report, Special Rapporteur analyzed the legal liability of the Government of Japan for "comfort women stations" and concluded that the Japanese Government is legally responsible for this issue and must take measures to redress it. However, we regret to say that the Government of Japan can not agree with the legal interpretations expressed in the appendix to this report nor can we accept its conclusion and recommendations which request the Japanese Government to take steps to provide redress rather than that which we are already undertaking.

Having said this, we are convinced that this Sub-Commission is not a forum to discuss or render decisions on liability and specific legal issues. We should like to concentrate ourselves on what we can actually do for the victims, fully considering the advanced age of the former "comfort women".

Taking into account the last year's encouragement of the Sub-Commission, we have been continuing to work with the AWF and to make efforts to seek the understanding of the relevant authorities and peoples of the countries and territories concerned. In light of our ongoing efforts, we hope this year the Sub-Commission will make conclusions which are consistent with those positive resolutions of the past.