



Government of Japan must adhere to CEDAW and restore justice for “Comfort Women”

We, a network of more than 150 women human rights activists and NGOs across the Asia-Pacific region and the world, are deeply concerned that the issue of Japan's military sexual slavery during the Second World War, the so-called “comfort women” issue, remains unresolved even today.

We are dismayed by the fact that the Government of Japan has not fulfilled its legal obligation to remedy the survivors of “comfort women” system despite that the acts constitute crimes under international law as fully examined by UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences (1995, 1996, 1998, 2001 and 2003), UN Special Rapporteur on systematic rape, sexual slavery and slavery-like practices during armed conflict (1998 and 2000) and ILO (1996-2009). We are also concerned that the Government of Japan has not taken measures to address the issue as recommended by various UN human rights bodies and mechanisms including the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR, 2001), the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1994 and 2003), the Committee Against Torture (CAT, 2007), the Human Rights Committee (CCPR, 2008) and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR, 2008) of the Human Rights Council.

The victimised women, euphemistically called “comfort women” at the time, came from different countries and regions in the Asia-Pacific region including North and South Korea, China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Indonesia, and East Timor. Today, the few remaining survivors still suffer from the persistent PTSD, poverty, physical and mental illness not to mention stigma attached to them in their community. Since the early 1990s, the survivors who broke the 50 years of painful silence and began to speak out about the crimes committed against them have demanded that the Government of Japan fully accept legal responsibility and restore justice for these crimes. Nonetheless, the Government of Japan has never fully accepted that it was and still is responsible under international law for the sexual slavery and other forms of violence against women committed by its Imperial Army during the war.

The wartime sexual slavery by Japan's military was a brutal, inhumane manifestation of colonialism, militarism, racism, sexism, and class system. Tens of thousands of women and girls from the Asia-Pacific region were taken to “comfort stations” and treated as sex slaves of Japanese soldiers wherever the Japanese troops were. Most of them were minors, and from poor, rural and lower class background, some were lured with false promises for jobs, some were forced after their family members were brutally killed by the soldiers.

In the Asia-Pacific region, violence against women in war and conflict continues. Women have been experiencing various forms of violence including sexual abuse and rape in conflict zones, under military dictatorship or special security acts, or in the increasing presence of soldiers around our community for military drills or as security guards to protect foreign corporations. Even today, during armed conflicts, rape is used as a weapon of war to intimidate and humiliate the “enemy”, and perpetrators often escape without facing charges. Increasing militarisation in the Asia-Pacific region especially Japan's re-militarisation with its economic interests which serves faithfully to the US-led “war on terror” as a loyal ally continues to be a major threat for other Asian countries.

It is crucial that the Government of Japan, one of the most influential states in the Asia-Pacific region, fulfill its international obligations and end the cycle of impunity of war time sexual slavery and sexual

violence against women, and by doing so, stop being a negative precedent in the pursuit of the global community to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women.

We, the undersigned, strongly call upon the CEDAW committee to once again urge the Government of Japan to conduct a thorough investigation, fully accept legal responsibility for the “comfort women” system, provide a formal and unequivocal apology and other forms of remedy as recommended by a variety of UN bodies to the survivors and families of victims of its military sexual slavery, and provide concrete measures to ensure non-repetition of such crimes when its troops are once again dispatched outside its own territory as they are today.

Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)

Signatories

Total number of signatories: 270 (Organisations: 22, Individuals: 248)

Organisations:

Asia-Japan Women's Resource Center;
Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA);
Citizens' Council for Human Rights Japan (CCHRJ);
CORE;
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Feminist League, Kazakhstan;
Gay Japan News;
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Kokoro-ni-Kizamu-kai in Shikoku,
Mahila Sarvangeen Utkarsh Mandal (MASUM), Pune, India;
Migrante International;
National Fisheries Solidarity Movement, Sri Lanka;
Solidarity for Asian People’s Advocacy Working Group on Northeast Asia (SAPA WG NEA);
Tamil Nadu Women's Forum (TNWF), India;
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日本の戦後責任を清算するため行動する北海道の会,
旧日本軍による性的被害女性を支える会.

Individuals:

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