

## **Hak-sun Kim, a Korean survivor who first broke silence publicly.**

### **The Witnesses**

The last interview with late Hak-sun Kim

A documentary video produced by News Tapa <https://newstapa.org/eng>

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January 26, 2016

Hak-sun Kim, a victim of the Japanese military “comfort women” system.

*“I’m afraid that there will be no one to tell the truth, after I die... if we all die.. Now I’m pretty old, but I am still extremely fearful of the Japanese... killing people. That was the most terrifying thing to me. Always. Since I saw it too many times... when I had been taken away, I saw them killing too many people...”*

*“I dreaded that they might kill me... When I was young, I couldn’t speak out even if I wanted to because I was too scared.”*

January 13, 2016. Japanese Embassy in Seoul, Korea

Narrator: It’s a bitter cold day. “Comfort women” survivors who are in their 90s came out to the street. The Halmonis (Grandmas in Korean) have strongly protested against the agreement between the Japanese government and the South Korean government regarding the “comfort women” issue.

Ok-sun Lee (90), a “comfort woman” survivor

*“We were taken away when we were 15 or 16. We are now in our 80s, 90s, and almost 100s, but there is still no news of apology from Japan.”*

Ilch’ul Kang (89), a “comfort woman” survivor

*“Then where was I taken to? They dragged me to China. I didn’t have any shoes or socks. I picked up an old pair of shoes from the street and wore them... when I was in China.”*

Bok-dong Kim (90), a “comfort woman” survivor

*“We don’t want to accept that kind of money... We will never trade our dignity with that ten billion yen, or even with a hundred billion yen.”*

Yongsoo Lee (88), a “comfort woman” survivor

*“We’ve been calling for a resolution for over twenty years. Rain or shine, snow or sleet, we have come out and demanded Japan to officially apologize and make reparations. Then, what happened? The Japanese Prime Minister Abe is saying that we were the “comfort women” when it was actually Japan that dragged us and made us the “comfort women”.*

Narrator: The survivors claim that Park Geunhye administration of Korea has ruined the achievements the survivors have accomplished, through 25 years of struggle. Hak-sun Kim's testimony in 1991 was critical in publicizing the Japanese military "comfort women" issue.

Hak-sun Kim

*"I started sharing my story, because I had to say what I wanted to say before I died. That's why I invited all the reporters from the media and said what I had to say in the evening of August 14. I am furious! Wake up, Korean women. It's so frustrating and suffocating. Look at Japan! After all that they've done, nothing's changed! We [Korea] could grow more even after all the atrocities we suffered from Japan. But then, what's wrong with the Korean women? They have no idea, and they don't care!"*

Narrator: Five months before Hak-sun Kim died in 1997, we listened to her story for the last time.

Subtitle: January 1992. National Assembly in South Korea.

Hak-sun Kim

*"When I was young, I couldn't say what I wanted, because I was so fearful that they might kill me. But as I grow older, the more I think about it, the more outraged I am."*

Subtitle: This is Hak-sun Kim's last interview in July 1997, just five months before she died.

Interviewer: Lira Kim

Camera: Jeongnam Park

*"I can't believe I couldn't talk about it all these years. Now that I've talked, the Japanese might kill me, but I was determined to speak out before I died. I began speaking out because there wasn't anyone else who was going to."*

Subtitle: August 14, 1991. Hak-sun Kim testifies about the Japanese military "comfort women" experience for the first time.

Narrator: In 1991, Hak-sun Kim became the first who testified about her suffering as a Japanese military "comfort woman." She exposed Japan's egregious war crimes they tried to cover up so much.

Hak-sun Kim

*"I'm at a loss for words to think back. When those enormous soldiers would pounce on me... I can't believe it... I'd bite my lips and struggle to get away but I'd be caught and dragged again... I'd get raped and I lose words for the pain in my heart. I would make up mind not to think about that time but I can't help. It torments me and I don't know what to do... whenever I think of that time."*

Narrator: Hak-sun Kim was born in Manchuria, China, during the Japanese colonial rule of Korea. After losing her father early, her family struggled financially. When Kim was sixteen, she was taken to a Japanese military base and became a "comfort woman."

Hak-sun Kim, a “comfort woman” survivor

*“When I was young, I heard that my father supported the Korean independence movement activists. He would invite them over to our house and feed them. That’s why he was taken away. One day, I remembered this story about him and realized what kind of person he was... I feel dismayed whenever I think of what happened to him. It breaks my heart to think about it, and to realize how they’ve ruined my whole family..”*

*“I was the only daughter in my family and my mom would take me with her. She raised me to be 16, and that’s when they took me away and put me in the Japanese military base by force. They ruined my whole life like this and I’ve been living by myself all these years. Every day, whenever no one is looking, I shed tears secretly. I don’t know how to relieve my anger. The more I think of it, the more I get furious... how outrageous! Whenever I think of those days, it makes me jump up and down with anger and frustration that might kill me. Maybe that’s why I have health problems like this... difficulty breathing... I can’t breath...”*

Narrator: A sixteen-year-old girl had to endure unimaginable violations at the “comfort station” managed by the Japanese military. Those painful memories haunted her the rest of her life.

Hak-sun Kim

*“I couldn’t come out and speak out when I was young, because of the shame. Shame was the first thing in my mind then. Now I’m older and it’s easier for me... since I’ve overcome those thoughts. But when I was younger, I was ashamed.. Wouldn’t you feel the same? The fact that you were taken to the Japanese military and used as a “comfort woman” instead of leading a life as others do. Is it acceptable? No, never! It’s ridiculous. Then the Korean people should’ve understand it and the high officials should’ve have done something about it. But instead, people disdained us, ignored us, treating the victims to be disgraceful and worthless. That’s why I kept weeping day and night behind the closed doors. I wept in secret; I had no one to talk to. That’s how we lived... Because we survived, now the whole world (will know)...”*

*“Now my mind is simple. All I want is revenge. To hear the words of repentance from those Japanese... that they are truly sorry for what they did to us. That is my only wish. I have nothing else.”*

Subtitle: December 28, 2015. Joint announcement by the Foreign Ministers of South Korea and Japan on the “comfort women” issue. “A foundation to be established in Korea.. Japan to pay 1 billion yen”

Subtitle: A foundation to support “comfort women” to be established with a Japanese government budget

Narrator: 25 years have passed since Hak-sun Kim’s first testimony. In December 2015, the Japanese and the South Korean governments made a sudden announcement that the “comfort women” issue is now has been resolved ‘finally and irreversibly.’

Japan: “Japan and Korea are now entering a new era.”

Narrator: The agreement is as follows: First, the Japanese government expresses apology and remorse for the “comfort women” issue that has occurred with the involvement of the Japanese military. Second, for the foundation to be established by the Korean government, the Japanese government will provide one billion yen (approximately 9.3 million U.S. dollars). Third, the Japanese government confirms that this issue is resolved finally and irreversibly with this announcement.

On the other hand, the South Korean government announced as follows: First, it confirms that the issue is resolved finally and irreversibly. Second, it will strive to properly resolve the issue of the Statue of Peace in front of the Embassy of Japan in Seoul. Third, it will refrain from accusing or criticizing [Japan] regarding this issue in the future.

#### Government of Japan

1. Japan admits that the “comfort women” issue occurred under the involvement of the Japanese military at the time. Expresses apology and remorse.
2. When the South Korean government establishes a foundation, it will provide one billion yen.
3. It confirms that the “comfort women” issue is finally and irreversibly resolved.

#### Government of Republic of Korea

1. Korea confirms that this issue is resolved finally and irreversibly.
2. It will solve the issue of the Statue of Peace in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul.
3. It will refrain from accusing or criticizing Japan regarding this issue.

Byung-se Yun, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Korea,  
*“We are entering a new era for Korea-Japan relations”*

Byung-se Yun, Minister of Foreign Affairs,  
*“We confirm, with the Government of Japan, that the issue will be resolved finally and irreversibly with this announcement... The government of Korea will cooperate with the Japanese government to implement its measures.”*

Gi-ho Song (attorney), *Lawyers for a Democratic Society*  
*The expression “irreversible” means that ‘this agreement cannot be canceled’ or ‘it cannot be withdrawn,’ if we were to interpret the underlying meaning. However, in the sense of the international human rights law, such concept as ‘irreversible,’ that is, to ‘stop demanding an investigation for the truth anymore,’ or to ‘stop demanding the acceptance of responsibility and reparations’ cannot be established, as we have pointed out many times previously.*

January 20, 2016. The Japanese Embassy in Seoul, Korea

Narrator: The United Nations and the International Criminal Court exclude war crimes and the crimes against humanity from the statute of limitation.

*“The agreement between the Foreign Ministers of South Korea and Japan is invalid!”*

*“Comfort women” system is the most egregious war crime that the Imperial Japan committed during WWII.*

Ch'an-un Park, Professor of Law School, Hanyang University

*“Handling an international war crime of the wartime sexual slavery in a manner which the two governments agree to resolve the entire issue with a payment of 1 billion yen is an impossible way to resolve an issue of sexual slavery, which is recognized as a war crime in the international law.”*

Narrator: Japan's proposed 1 billion yen from the Japanese government budget isn't government reparations but an assistance fund. Japan has proposed in the past a financial assistance with privately raised fund.

Hak-sun Kim

*“They are trying to cover it up with a small amount of payment to each victim. What we're demanding from the Japanese government is their apology and reparations. Their response to our demand is that, they cannot apologize, and pay the proper reparations as well. So what they're saying now is that, instead, some Japanese women's organizations will raise money and give us 2 million yen or so each, as a 'consolation money.' That's what Keiko Usuki (from the Asian Women's Fund) is saying, but we can never... never accept such an offer. No way! Consolation money? Why the hell would we accept 'consolation money'? 'Consolation money' for what? No, we can never accept such a thing. You should properly make an official apology and reparations.”*

Narrator: The Japanese government's offer to pay 'consolation money' or 'assistance fund' implies its intention to deny its legal responsibility for the “comfort women” issue.

Gi-ho Song (attorney), *Lawyers for a Democratic Society*

*When the private fund (Asian Women's Fund) was being established to resolve the “comfort women” issue in the past, the Japanese government was involved in the formation of that fund, although the money came from the private sector. However, the crux of the matter was whether or not it was a government reparations. It doesn't matter how large or small the amount maybe – the money offered by the Japanese government would be meaningful only if the nature of this fund is a government reparations. However, what they're proposing is to provide an operating fund for the foundation to be established by the South Korean government – this is essentially the same as the private fund Japan has offered in the past, because it's not a government reparations.*

Narrator: The legal force of this agreement is also questionable because the two governments did not create a formal agreement document with signatures. Experts point out that it may have been the two governments' scheme to circumvent the ratification process in each country's parliament.

Ch'an-un Park, Professor of Law School, Hanyang University

*“It is an international standard to formalize this kind of significant agreement in the form of treaty by way of a signed document. Why do you think the diplomats of the two governments, who are the experts of these procedures, handled this agreement so sloppily? In my opinion, the Korean government's position, at least, was to avoid many controversies this agreement*

*may have raised domestically, as well as the procedural issues the government may have faced, had it pursued a full treaty that required a ratification from the National Assembly. That is my interpretation.”*

Narrator: Experts claim that this agreement is invalid due to the significant flaws in its content and the procedure. Immediately after the announcement, statements distorting the truth and denying Japan's legal responsibility are pouring out one after another in Japan.

January 19, 2016. Fumio Kishida, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan

*“Japan's position is that the term 'sex slaves,' which is against the facts, shouldn't be used.”*

Yoshitaka Sakurada, a member of parliament from the Liberal Democratic Party, *“'Comfort women' were professional prostitutes”*

Narrator: Even a statement insisting the “comfort women” were professional prostitutes came out.

Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan

*“Our position has not changed that there is no evidence to prove that the Japanese military or government directly ordered to forcibly take the women”*

Hak-sun Kim

*“I think the Japanese are not human beings. How can humans be like that? How is that possible? They went around to trample upon so many legitimate countries and now they pretend as if nothing has happened... The current Prime Minister of Japan, Hashimoto, is truly bad. He is horrible. He is worse than other prime ministers in the past. Do you know how many of them I've seen so far?”*

Narrator: Korean government even agreed to make an effort to properly resolve the issue of the Statue of Peace, located in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul.

Fumio Kishida, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan

*“As I said before, we believe that the statue would be properly moved to a different location.”*

Narrator: As the agreement was announced, Korean youths and students gathered and began a protest to protect the statue in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul. The Statue of Peace had been established with the funds raised from Korean citizens, as a memorial to the tragedy of war and hope for peace. Relocating the statue from the Japanese Embassy to somewhere else would mean that Korea will give up on demanding Japan's responsibility for the “comfort women” issue going forward. We're curious: Who was this agreement made for?

Hak-sun Kim

*“Can you imagine how painful it is to hate someone? It is so distressing to hate someone..”*



“Girls Being Burned” by Ilch’ul Kang (a survivor)

“Taken Away” by Sundeok Kim (a survivor)

“The Day that I Was Taken” by Bokdong Kim (a survivor)

“Japanese Soldiers Picking Pears” by Deokgyeong Kang (a survivor)

“Stolen Purity” by Deokgyeong Kang (a survivor)

“We must record in the history what we were forced to do” (Hak-sun Kim)

*“If I am born again, my greatest hope is to be born as a girl, get married, and have children.”*  
(Bokdeuk Kim)

*“I come out to the street again, because it is too painful. Because I hope it never happens again.”* (Wonok Gil)

Narrator: What would Hak-sun Kim say about the 2015 Agreement between Japan and South Korea, had she been alive? In her interview us five months before her death, Kim suggested a way to resolve the “comfort women” issue.

Hak-sun Kim

*“My shame is the secondary matter. It’s not the first priority. Of course, I can’t even describe how mortified and unfair I feel. But think about it. What on earth did Japan do? They started a war, claiming that they’re not the aggressor, but a protector of the other Asian countries, to bring them liberation. What kind of bullshit is it? Does it make sense at all? How many countries had to suffer because of the war Japan started? So many Asian countries suffered greatly, then, what they need to do is to repent and offer an acceptable apology, if they deserve to be human. If they are human.*

*I don’t care about anyone else but the Japanese king. They call him an emperor, but to me, he is just a king of Japan. The king of Japan must acknowledge and apologize that Japan was wrong to have started a war at that time, and he is deeply sorry. I don’t need anyone else. No one else in Japan will do. It must be the king of Japan who should make an apology. What good would other people be for? Isn’t it correct?*

Narrator: Kim’s solution is for Japan to confess its crimes in details, pay legal reparations according to the law, and educate the public to prevent recurrence of this history.

At the time of the interview, Kim said that she could not die before receiving an apology from Japan, although she was battling a disease.

Hak-sun Kim

*“Anyways, I won’t die until things are concluded. I would live up to 110, even 120. I am not going to give in. I must see it with my own eyes, and hear it with my own ears..”*

Narrator: Five months after the interview, Hak-sun Kim departed this world full of resentment. Unfulfilled her wish to receive an apology from Japan, Kim passed away.

Late Hak-sun Kim, born in 1924.

August 14, 1991, She testified about her experience as a “comfort woman” for the first time.

December 16, 1997, She died at the age of 73.

Narrator: 18 years after Hak-sun Kim’s death, the agreement made between Japan and South Korea didn’t meet her wishes. Not only was Japan’s sincere apology absent, but also Japan’s acceptance of legal responsibility, government reparations, and the promise of ongoing education to prevent repetition of this history were missing in the agreement.

Eunji Lee (20)

*“1997... is the year I was born. It’s been almost 20 years and it’s a shame that it’s still not been resolved. It’s even more heartbreaking that this agreement was the extent of the solution offered by the government. I am so sorry for Grandma Hak-sun Kim.”*

Reporter: “What do you think the survivors’ wish is?”

Junho Bae (28)

*“I guess it would be to receive a sincere apology from Japan”*

*“I think they would wish to have their life back, to return to their younger self before they were taken away by the Japanese military. They could’ve lived a normal life as a woman, had it not been for what Japan did to them. These war crimes totally ruined their individual lives.”*

Nayoung Kim (21)

*“That there would be no more war on earth? I think it would also be one of their wishes.”*

Narrator: In biting cold below 14°F, these young people started a protest in the street, in order to protect the Statue of Peace and to struggle with the “comfort women” survivors.

*“Let’s survive and see you in the morning.”*

Narrator: The government even banned them from putting up an insulated tent. On the street, in the biting cold, these young people have been guarding the Statue of Peace for twenty days.

Overnight, the temperature dropped to 5°F. Everything froze in the severely cold weather. We were concerned for those young people who stayed on the street overnight. Pushing aside the frozen plastic covers, they wake up one by one. From their hair to sleeping bags, icicles have been formed.

Reporter: Were you able to sleep?

*“Yes, a little bit.”*

Jinhee Jeon (31)

*“Yes, one of the citizen supporters brought it to us last night, but it’s all frozen overnight.”*



Narrator: It must've been impossible to get good sleep in the harsh cold weather that even froze the liquid in a thermos bottle. Although the weather is getting harsher, these young people are determined to guard the Statue of Peace.

Saem Kim (25)

*"We lost so many "comfort women" survivors last year. Whenever I went to their funerals, I was so heartbroken. I don't want to lose any more survivors like that, that's why I am here."*

*"The reason why I stay here to guard the statue is... they might really remove it if we aren't here. That's why we're here. We really want to protect it."*

*"I thought, sacrificing one day of my life is nothing, compared to the decades of struggle the grandmas have been fighting. I think it's important for us to offer our time and heart and join the movement, to raise our voices together."*

Narrator: The police sent the young protesters a subpoena, saying that they're conducting a protest without registering.

January 21, 2016. Jong-ro Police Station.

The young protesters appeared at the police station.

*Student: "Now the police are abusing the law to oppress people's rights and freedom. According to their standard, it would be illegal to chant slogans at a press conference or to sing songs at a cultural festival."*

*"To President Geunhye Park,.."*

*is hereby summoned by the people.*

*You are hereby summoned to appear in front of the Statue of Peace on January 23, 2016 at 2pm, to answer the following charges against you: 1. Crime of selling the history for money, 2. Crime of betraying the people, 3. Crime of lying that the agreement is a good deal, 4. Crime of removing the weather gears from college students, 5. Crime of violating the Statue's freedom of residential mobility, etc.*

In contrast to the indulgence the Korean government allowed for Japan by making a shoddy agreement for Japan's heinous war crimes, it is strictly enforcing laws against the students who are protesting the agreement. Whom does the Korean government exist for?

Hak-sun Kim

*"How in the world... are the Korean government officials so at a loss when it comes to Japan? What is wrong with them? I don't understand why they can't do anything against Japan. It upsets me the most. Whenever they are with the Japanese, they become the Japanese. It is the most frustrating thing for me. I really hope they don't act like that.."*

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