

Kono Statement

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Link: <https://www.awf.or.jp/e6/statement-02.html>

INTRODUCTION: The testimony of a Korean survivor, Hak-sun Kim, who first broke silence publicly in 1991 about the ordeal she went through as a sex slave under the Japanese military, sparked interests around the globe, synergizing with the shocking news of systematic rape against women in former Yugoslavia. Around the same time, a Japanese scholar and professor, Yoshiaki Yoshimi exposed the critical military documents proving the systematic involvement of the Japanese military in the “comfort station” system. A Japanese human rights attorney Etsuro Tutsuka introduced the issue as a “sexual slavery” at UN, and the UN Human Rights bodies became highly interested in the issue, thanks to the surviving grandmas’ testimonies and the activists’ tireless efforts to raise awareness at UN. The Japanese government was under pressure to somehow respond to this issue, and conducted interviews with South Korean survivors to conduct an investigation, which led to the landmark announcement of the Kono Statement.

It was a meaningful apology that expressed the Japanese government’s official position that accepted some moral responsibility for the establishment and management of the “comfort stations,” as well as the forcible recruitment of the “comfort women” victims by its military; however, it clearly had its limitations in that it was never ratified by the Japan’s Diet, nor was it a cabinet decision, leaving this apology in somewhat grey area where no follow-up measures such as government compensation would be required by law. In 2014, under Shinzo Abe’s second term as the Japanese Prime Minister, the government attempted to invalidate the Kono Statement by reviewing the process in which it was adopted, only to withdraw its original attempt to deny the Statement due to heavy international criticism. However, the promises in the Kono statement to “reiterate our firm determination never to repeat the same mistake by forever engraving such issues in our memories through the study and teaching of history” has de facto been put in a trashcan since the early 2000s when the mention of “comfort women” has completely disappeared from Japan’s middle school textbook, and with the full-scale “History War” the Japanese government is waging to erase, deny and whitewash the “comfort women” atrocity around the globe.

TEXT:

Statement by the Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono on the result of the study on the issue of "comfort women"

August 4, 1993

The Government of Japan has been conducting a study on the issue of wartime "comfort women" since December 1991. I wish to announce the findings as a result of that study.

As a result of the study which indicates that comfort stations were operated in extensive areas for long periods, it is apparent that there existed a great number of comfort women. Comfort stations were operated in response to the request of the military authorities of the day. The then Japanese military was, directly or indirectly, involved in the establishment

and management of the comfort stations and the transfer of comfort women. The recruitment of the comfort women was conducted mainly by private recruiters who acted in response to the request of the military. The Government study has revealed that in many cases they were recruited against their own will, through coaxing, coercion, etc., and that, at times, administrative/military personnel directly took part in the recruitments. They lived in misery at comfort stations under a coercive atmosphere.

As to the origin of those comfort women who were transferred to the war areas, excluding those from Japan, those from the Korean Peninsula accounted for a large part. The Korean Peninsula was under Japanese rule in those days, and their recruitment, transfer, control, etc., were conducted generally against their will, through coaxing, coercion, etc.

Undeniably, this was an act, with the involvement of the military authorities of the day, that severely injured the honor and dignity of many women. The Government of Japan would like to take this opportunity once again to extend its sincere apologies and remorse to all those, irrespective of place of origin, who suffered immeasurable pain and incurable physical and psychological wounds as comfort women.

It is incumbent upon us, the Government of Japan, to continue to consider seriously, while listening to the views of learned circles, how best we can express this sentiment.

We shall face squarely the historical facts as described above instead of evading them, and take them to heart as lessons of history. We hereby reiterate our firm determination never to repeat the same mistake by forever engraving such issues in our memories through the study and teaching of history.

As actions have been brought to court in Japan and interests have been shown in this issue outside Japan, the Government of Japan shall continue to pay full attention to this matter, including private researched related thereto.