

## San Francisco – Osaka sister city termination (Media report. Letter from the mayor of Osaka) SF – Osaka Sister City (San Francisco mayor's response)

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“The concept of sister cities began in the 1950s as a way to strengthen cultural diplomacy, particularly in trying moments.”  
- Adam Kaplan, Sister Cities International (2017)

OVERVIEW: On July 24, 2018, the Mayor of Osaka, Hirofumi Yoshimura, wrote a letter to the Mayor of San Francisco, London Breed, to terminate the 60-year sister city relationship between Osaka, JPN and San Francisco, USA.

In a Bloomberg news article focused on the end of the sister-city relationship, historian Jordan Sand “called Osaka’s threat to cut ties a “missed opportunity,” not only for the two cities to collaborate on such an important issue, but also to foster a longstanding city-to-city relationship.” (Bloomberg, 2017).

The cause of the termination of the sister-city relationship was the installment of the “Comfort Women” Column of Strength memorial in San Francisco on September 22, 2017. It was designed by sculptor Steven Whyte to depict three young girls of specific nationalities (Chinese, Korean, and Filipino), being watched by a *halmoni* (grandmother in Korean). The visual inspiration for the *halmoni* watching over them was Kim Hak-Sun, a “comfort woman” survivor, human rights activist, and the first Korean to publicly speak out about her sexual enslavement under the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II: the inspiration for the girls were the many women and girls in China, Korea, and the Philippines who fell victim to the Japanese Imperial Army’s system of sexual slavery during World War II.

In his letter, shown below, Mayor Yoshimura stated that the words inscribed on San Francisco’s “comfort women” memorial, were “one-sided claims” parading as historical fact. Mayor Yoshimura has also presented the argument that because Japan feels they have already atoned for the issue, there should not be the need to erect memorials dedicated specifically to the “comfort women” any longer.

The inscription on the statue reads,

“This monument bears witness to the suffering of hundreds of thousands of women and girls, euphemistically called ‘Comfort Women,’ who were sexually enslaved by the Japanese Imperial Armed Forces in thirteen Asian-Pacific countries from 1931-1945.”

- Inscription on the “Comfort Women” Column of Strength” in San Francisco

In response, Mayor London Breed said that the ““Comfort Women” Column of Strength” was:

“a symbol of the struggle faced by all women who have been, and are currently, forced to endure the horrors of enslavement and sex trafficking... These victims deserve our respect and this memorial reminds us all of events and lessons we must never forget.”

- Mayor London Breed, San Francisco, 2018 (BBC, 2018)

Sources:

1. Osaka Letter
2. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-12-04/a-comfort-women-memorial-comes-between-san-francisco-and-osaka>
3. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/04/us/osaka-sf-comfort-women-statue.html>
4. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-45747803>  
<http://2007-2017-blogs.state.gov/stories/2012/04/03/leveraging-sister-city-relationships-driver-economic-development.html>