

## Asian Women's Fund

Established by: Japanese government

Date: 1995~2007

**INTRODUCTION:** In the wake of the growing number of testimonies from the survivors in Asia Pacific region who also came out encouraged by Hak-sun Kim's first public testimony, and the high interest at the UN, the Japanese government was under great pressure to respond to the demands of the survivors for official apology and government reparations.

The Japanese government's position was that the issue of reparation had already been settled by the San Francisco Peace Treaty, bilateral treaties and so on, and Japan does not bear any more responsibility to pay reparations to the victims from the Pacific War.

Caught in the dilemma, the Japanese government established a private Foundation called Asian Women's Friendship and Peace Foundation [*Josei no Tane no Aja Heiwa Kokumin Kikin*] in June 1995, to raise money from the citizens and corporations to pay monetary assistance to the surviving victims of the "comfort station" system.

The Asian Women's Fund invited immediate criticism from the survivors and their supporters from within and outside of Japan who considered this "atonement/sympathy money" from private donation an insult to the survivors who demanded the Japanese government's acknowledgement of the state legal responsibility for this war crime.

In the report presented to UN Commission on Human Rights on Violence against Women on January 4, 1996, Special Rapporteur Dr. Radhika Coomaraswamy called on the Japanese government to accept legal responsibility, pay compensation, make a full disclosure of documents and evidence in its possession, and so on, although she considered the Asian Women's Fund "as an expression of the Japanese government's moral concern for the fate of the comfort women."

In 1996, a few days after the announcement was made that the Asian Women's Fund will pay about \$18,500 USD to about three hundred "comfort women" survivors in South Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines, along with the letter of apology from then Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto, the prime minister paid a formal visit to the Yasukuni Shrine, the site where the war dead are enshrined, including the convicted and executed Class A war criminals. No survivor from China or North Korea was included in the Fund.

Asian Women's Fund created a huge controversy and division in South Korea, when the vocal survivors denounced the Fund while the Fund tried to contact the other survivors in secret to persuade them to accept the money. The Fund dissolved in 2007.

Sources: Asian Women's Fund official website <https://www.awf.or.jp/e2/foundation.html>  
Report presented to UN Commission on Human Rights on Violence against Women by Special Rapporteur Dr. Radhika Coomaraswamy <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/commission/country52/53-add1.htm>