

Memorial war in the Philippines

OVERVIEW: On January 3, 2019, one of the global memorials to victims of the Japanese Imperial Army's "comfort system," the Statue of Peace, was taken down just two days after it was unveiled to the public. The statue had been placed within the Mary Mother of Mercy shelter on Friday, January 1, 2019, and was removed without any notice to the nuns at the shelter for elderly and displaced peoples.

The move was catalyzed by strong opposition from the Japanese embassy in Manila, Philippines, and the Japanese government. The following is a statement by the Japanese embassy, submitted to, and published by, the Manila Shimbun, a newspaper in the Philippines written in the Japanese language:

“We believe that the establishment of a comfort woman statue in other countries, including this case, is extremely disappointing, not compatible with the Japanese government”

- Japanese Embassy, 2019

This was not the first time a “comfort woman” memorial was taken down in the Philippines. Previously, in April 2018, another statue commemorating the “comfort women” was removed from the Roxas Baywalk Area in Manila.

These removals were met with condemnation from supporters of “comfort women” victims such as Gabriela and Lila Pilipina as a move that insults the histories of the victims of the hundreds of Filipinas who were held as sex slaves by the Japanese Imperial Army's soldiers during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines during WWII.

While many locals are supporters of the “comfort women” movement, government officials are hesitant to go against Japan's interests, as Japan invests heavily in infrastructure in the Philippines. A statement by Philippine's Foreign Secretary, Alan Peter Cayetano, [expresses this hesitance](#):

“You can't strengthen your relationship long term if you keep bringing up things that you think are settled.”

- Foreign Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano, 2018

The public statements by Lila Pilipina and Gabriela are below:

“Today, it demands that we totally forget its war crimes and demands as well that we remain silent as it re-establishes itself militarily as a junior partner of U.S. expansionism in the Asia-Pacific region,”

- Lila Pilipina, 2019

“With the statue's removal, Japan once again succeeded in imposing its revisionist take on WWII on puppet regimes like the Duterte regime.”

- Gabriela, 2018

Sources:

- <https://rappler.com/nation/comfort-woman-statue-manila-removed>
- https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2019/01/03/Statue-dedicated-to-comfort-women-removed-in-the-Philippines/4461546541049/
- <https://www.rappler.com/nation/cayetano-japan-relationship-comfort-woman-statue-manila-bay>