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Japan: Lack of truth, justice and reparations tarnishes Japan's image

On the occasion of International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, Amnesty International once again calls on the Japanese government to accept full responsibility and apologize unreservedly to survivors of Japan's military sexual slavery system.

Amnesty International is particularly concerned by the Japanese government's recent attempts to reopen assessment of the military sexual slavery system by correcting what they regard as "incorrect" information circulating worldwide.

It is a well-documented fact that women and girls were trapped, deceived or otherwise forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese Imperial Army in the different occupied countries throughout the Asia Pacific region before and during World War II. They were kept in under custody of Japanese military where they were repeatedly raped and brutalized for months or years on end. The vast majority were under 20 and some were as young as 12.

On 3 October, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe criticized what he calls "false reporting" of the issue of Japan's military sexual slavery, saying it has severely tarnished the country's image overseas. Abe said many people had been hurt and angered by erroneous reporting on the issue and he vowed to help spread what he called the "correct perceptions" of history.ⁱ

Following the Prime Minister's remarks, on 16 October, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga announced that the government of Japan has demanded Radhika Coomaraswamy, former Special Rapporteur on violence against women from 1994-2003, revise the 1996 report on the issue of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery in Wartime which is often referred to as the "Coomaraswamy report."ⁱⁱ This report illustrated how imperial Japan forced women and girls into sexual slavery and demanded the government of Japan to compensate and apologize to the survivors.

These calls were triggered by the Japanese mainstream newspaper Asahi Newspaper's retraction of series of articles based on the testimony of a former Japanese soldier Seiji Yoshida. Yoshida testified that he had helped kidnap Korean women to work in the brothels, however this testimony was later determined as inaccurate. Both Asahi's articles and Coomaraswamy report contained some reference to his testimony. The flaws in Yoshida's testimony do not however call into question the existence Japan's military sexual slavery system and the state's obligation to provide full reparations.

Coomaraswamy responded in an interview with Yomiuri Newspaper that the Asahi's retraction did not convince her of a need to amend her report which was based mostly on the testimonies of "a large number of 'comfort women.'"

Contrary to Prime Minister Abe's remarks, it is not the reporting of so-called false reporting of the wartime sexual slavery system that has tarnished Japan's image but rather the continued failure to accept full responsibility for this system and the on-going attempts to re-write history.

Amnesty International urges the Government of Japan to:

- Accept full responsibility and apologize unreservedly to survivors of Japan's sexual slavery system in a way that is acceptable to the majority of the women and which publicly acknowledges the harm that these women have suffered and restores the dignity of the survivors.
- Ensure other measures are taken to provide survivors with full and effective reparation, to address the harm they have suffered.
- Ensure non-repetition by including an accurate account of Japan's military sexual slavery system in textbooks used in the Japanese educational system.
- To refute statements made by government authorities and public figures attempting to deny or justify the military sexual slavery system.

ⁱ The Asahi Shinbun *Prime Minister mentioned that people were hurt because of false reporting on 'comfort women'*, 3 October 2014.

ⁱⁱ Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, its Causes and Consequences, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, in Accordance with Commission on Human Rights Resolution 1994/45. Report on the Mission to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Republic of Korea and Japan on the issue of Military Sexual Slavery in Wartime. E/CN.4/1996/53/Add.1, 4 January 1996.