

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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## **Japan: International Labour Organization fails to demand justice for the survivors of Japan's military sexual slavery system**

Another year has passed with the International Labour Organization's (ILO) annual International Labour Conference failing to call on Japan to account for its military sexual slavery system from 1932 to 1945, which violated ILO Convention No. 29 (Forced Labour Convention).

Amnesty International urges the international employer and labour community to add their voice to calls for the Japanese government to unequivocally accept responsibility and provide justice for the "comfort women". Time is running out, as the survivors of the "comfort women" system are now elderly and many have passed away.

Up to 200,000 women were sexually enslaved by the Japanese Imperial Army from 1932 to the end of the Second World War. Many of these women, now in their eighties and nineties, demand justice and are calling on Japan to accept responsibility for subjecting them to forced labour, and physical and sexual abuse.

Japan's violation of the Forced Labour Convention has never been added to the International Labour Conference agenda despite repeated appeals by trade unions in previous years to table this important issue. Sadly, this year was no exception.

During the Conference, the International Trade Union Confederation and worker delegates met with the Japanese government delegates to call on them to resolve the "comfort women" issue. The Worker Spokesperson also requested that this issue be included in the Conference agenda next year.

Japan ratified the Forced Labour Convention in 1932 and therefore is fully accountable for its military system of sexual slavery conducted from 1932 to 1945. However, the government has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing. In response to Japan's denial, the ILO's Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) in 1996 concluded that "allegations refer to gross human rights abuses and sexual abuse of women detained in so-called military "comfort stations", a situation which falls within the prohibitions contained in the Convention" and this position has been reiterated in subsequent CEACR reports.

Survivors, euphemistically known as "comfort women", have suffered from physical and mental ill-health, isolation, shame and often extreme poverty as a result of their enslavement. Testimonies and other evidence reveal that women were enslaved, repeatedly raped, tortured and ill-treated for months or years. They were not free to leave or choose the nature or terms of their service.

The Japanese military targeted women and girls who because of age, poverty, class, family status, education, nationality or ethnicity, were more likely to be deceived and trapped into the sexual slavery system. Some women were confined to one place, while others were taken to or near frontlines where they were not only repeatedly raped but also exposed to the dangers of the battlefield.

Amnesty International believes that actions by the Japanese government to deny and obstruct justice only compound the human rights violations committed against these women.

**Background**

The annual International Labour Conference met in Geneva from 2-18 June. The Conference participants consist of delegates representing governments, employers and workers from ILO member states. During the Conference specific cases of individual countries are nominated to be added to the agenda of the Conference Committee on Applications and Standards (CAS) for review.

Since 2007, the USA, Canada, the Netherlands, South Korea, Taiwan and the European Parliament, which represents the 27 member states of the European Union, have all passed resolutions calling on the government of Japan to accept responsibility and apologize for the crimes committed against these women. As of March 2010, 21 city councils in Japan have passed statements calling on the central government to resolve the “comfort women” issue.

Despite consistently robust conclusions and recommendations by international human rights monitoring bodies, such as the UN Committee against Torture, Human Rights Committee, and UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the government of Japan has refused to change its position denying responsibility for the “comfort women” system.

Amnesty International calls on the Government of Japan to immediately provide redress to those who have suffered, specifically to:

- accept full responsibility, including legal responsibility, in a way that publicly acknowledges the harm that these women have suffered and restores dignity to the survivors;
- apologize fully and unequivocally for the crimes committed against the women;
- provide adequate and effective compensation to survivors and their immediate families directly from the government;
- include an accurate account of the sexual slavery system in Japanese educational textbooks on the Second World War.

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