

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PUBLIC STATEMENT

AI Index: ASA 22/009/2010
25 November 2010

Amnesty International supports international petition for justice for “comfort women”

Amnesty International takes the opportunity of International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women to join with activists in Japan to call on the government of Japan to provide justice for the survivors of Japan’s World War II military sexual slavery system.

Today, a petition of around 620,000 signatures signed by people from Korea, Japan, the Philippines and other countries has been presented to the Prime Minister’s Office. The petition calls on the government of Japan to draft and pass a bill without delay, seeking a comprehensive resolution to the “comfort women” issue. Amnesty International adds its voice to this call.

In May, Navanethem Pillay, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights visited Japan and met former Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama. She encouraged the government of Japan to pursue its commitment to human rights reforms, including the establishment of an independent national human rights institution and the ratification of additional complaints procedures under international treaties. She also raised specifically the need for a solution for the surviving women in a way that meets their expectations.

Also in May, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Rashida Manjoo, noted that as victims of sexual crimes, survivors “do not want to receive economic compensation without an official apology and official recognition of State responsibility”. She evaluated the “comfort women” movement as one of the most organized and well-documented movements for reparations for women. The call for justice for these women has also been made by various UN human rights bodies including the UN Human Rights Committee, the Committee Against Torture, and the Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Recommendations have also been made by state parties during the UN Universal Periodic Review.

From around 1932 to the end of World War II, women throughout the Asia-Pacific region were sexually enslaved by the Japanese Imperial Army. Survivors did not speak of their ordeal for over 50 years. The continued denial of justice prolongs the humiliation and suffering of the “comfort women” survivors. Amnesty International considers this a serious violation of their human rights.

Amnesty International notes that in Japan since 2008, a total of 36 local town and city councils have made statements calling on the central Japanese government to apologize fully for the “comfort women” system. Local governments passed these statements following a series of resolutions passed internationally in the US, Canada, the Netherlands, South Korea, Taiwan and in the European Parliament, representing the 27 member states of the European Union.

Amnesty International calls on:

- The Diet to make a full unequivocal apology to survivors, including accepting legal responsibility for the crimes, acknowledging that the crimes amount to crimes under international law, and acknowledging the harm suffered by survivors in a way that is acceptable to the majority of the survivors
- The Government and Diet to review national laws with a view to removing existing obstacles to obtaining full reparations before Japanese courts and to ensure that Japanese educational texts include an accurate account of the sexual slavery system

- The Government to immediately implement effective administrative mechanisms to provide full reparations to all survivors of sexual slavery

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Public Document

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