

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

15 August 2012
AI Index: ASA 22/014/2012

Still no justice for the survivors of Japan's military sexual slavery system

On the occasion of the 67th anniversary of the end of World War II, Amnesty International repeats its demand for justice for the women who survived Japan's military slavery system.

This year marks the 5th anniversary of the adoption of the US House of Representatives resolution calling on the Japanese government to ensure justice for the survivors of Japan's military sexual slavery system. This resolution described the system of enforced sexual slavery as "unprecedented in its cruelty and magnitude" and "one of the largest cases of human trafficking in the 20th century".

Since 2007, in addition to the US resolution, Canada, the Netherlands, South Korea, Taiwan and the European Parliament, which represents the 27 member states of the EU, have all passed resolutions calling on the government of Japan to accept responsibility and apologize for the crimes committed against these women.

These resolutions and the growing international pressure on Japan is thanks to the survivors of Japan's military sexual slavery system who have campaigned around the world to call for justice and an end to violence against women.

One such woman is Gil Won-ok, who travelled to Europe in 2007 to call on the European and Dutch Parliaments to urge the Japanese government to resolve this issue. Gil was 13 when she was promised factory work, but eventually found herself in northeast China where she worked as a "comfort woman". Gil broke her silence in 1998, 53 years after her traumatic experience and has since travelled to Europe, Japan, Australia, and America to call for justice for herself and all survivors of military sexual slavery and for an end to violence against women.

The vast majority of women enslaved were under the age of 20; some girls were as young as 12 when they were abducted. The Japanese Imperial Army used violence and deception to obtain women and girls. Survivors rarely spoke of their experiences even as they suffered from physical and mental ill-health, isolation, shame and often extreme poverty as a result of their enslavement

Women throughout Asia-Pacific region were sexually enslaved by the Japanese Imperial Army from around 1932 to the end of World War II. However, until this day, Japan has failed to apologize unequivocally, accept legal responsibility and provide adequate reparations for the survivors of Japan's military sexual slavery system.

UN Treaty Bodies including the Human Rights Committee, the Committee Against Torture, and the Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women have all called on the government of Japan to apologise, and accept responsibility, including legal responsibility for the system of military sexual slavery and to provide rehabilitation measures including adequate compensation.

In May 2010 at the 14th UN Human Rights Council in Geneva the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women issued a report which notes that as victims of sexual crimes, the survivors "do not want to receive economic compensation without an official apology and

official recognition of State responsibility". During a visit to Japan in May 2010, Navi Pillay, the High Commissioner for Human Rights also appealed to the government to move beyond "half measures" and "deal once and for all with the 'comfort women' issue by apologizing and providing redress to thousands of women victims of wartime sexual slavery".

Despite international pressure, the Japanese government continues to deny justice to the survivors of Japan's military sexual slavery system insisting that any obligation to provide justice has been settled through peace treaties and arrangements which sought to preclude further reparations. However, compensations offered by the government have failed to meet international standards on reparation and are perceived by survivors as a way of buying their silence. These women are now elderly, and many have passed away without seeing justice.

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 these women have suffered and is acceptable to the majority of the survivors;
- apologize fully and unequivocally for the crimes committed against the women;
- provide adequate and effective reparations to survivors directly from the government in line with international standards and including the participation of survivors to establish what constitutes adequate and effective reparations;
- include an accurate account of the sexual slavery system in Japanese educational textbooks on the Second World War.