

Antonio V. Cuenco
Chairperson
Foreign Affairs Committee,
3/F Annex Building
House of Representatives
Quezon City
Philippines

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Dear Chairperson

OPEN LETTER: HOUSE RESOLUTION 124 CALLING ON THE GOVERNMENT OF JAPAN TO APOLOGIZE FOR THE SYSTEM OF MILITARY SEXUAL SLAVERY BEFORE AND DURING WORLD WAR II

Amnesty International strongly urges you to bring House Resolution 124 to a re-vote and to encourage the required number of legislators to attend this vote to meet the necessary quorum before the June 13 recess. House Resolution 124 was unanimously passed by the Foreign Affairs Committee on 11 March. However, the initial vote failed to meet the necessary quorum and the Resolution has been referred back to the Foreign Affairs Committee for a re-vote.

House Resolution 124 calls on the Government of Japan to officially apologize and provide adequate compensation to the women forced into military sexual slavery by the Japanese Imperial Army before and during World War II in what has been described as one of the largest cases of human trafficking in the 20th Century. These women have been waiting for justice for over 60 years. The continued denial of justice prolongs the humiliation and suffering of the ‘comfort women’ survivors. Amnesty International considers this an on-going human rights violation.

Up to 200,000 women, including Filipino women, are believed to have been forced into sexual servitude by the Japanese Imperial Army before and during World War II. The Japanese Imperial Army targeted women and girls who, because of age, poverty, class, family status, education, nationality or ethnicity were most susceptible to being forced, at times through deception and entrapment, into the sexual slavery system. The vast majority of women enslaved were under the age of 20; some girls were as young as 12 when they were abducted. Survivors have suffered physical and mental-ill-health, isolation, shame and often extreme poverty as a result of their enslavement.

Parliaments around the world have passed similar resolutions calling for an official apology and compensation for the victims of Japan’s military sexual slavery system. The US House of Representatives passed House Resolution 121 in July 2007, calling on the Government of Japan to “formally acknowledge, apologize and accept historical responsibility in a clear and unequivocal

manner for its Imperial Armed Force's coercion of young women into sexual slavery" during World War II.

In November 2007, three former 'comfort women' from the Philippines, South Korea and the Netherlands visited Europe to speak to Parliamentarians and urge them to call on Japan to officially apologize. After hearing their testimony, the Netherlands Parliament unanimously passed a resolution, which calls on Japan to "take full responsibility for the involvement of the Japanese army in the system of forced prostitution" and calls for compensation and an accurate account of the military sexual slavery system in teaching materials.

The European Parliament passed a resolution on 13 December 2007. It calls on the Government of Japan to, among other things, "implement effective administrative mechanisms to provide reparations to all surviving victims of the "comfort women" system and the families of its deceased victims" and calls for the Japanese Government to formally "acknowledge, apologize and accept historical and legal responsibility, in a clear and unequivocal manner, for its Imperial Armed Forces' coercion of young women into sexual slavery".

In Canada, Motion 291 was passed on 28 November 2007. This motion calls on the Government of Japan "to clearly and publicly refute any claims that the sexual enslavement and trafficking of the 'comfort women' for the Japanese Imperial Forces never occurred; to take full responsibility for the involvement of the Japanese Imperial Forces in the system of forced prostitution, including through a formal and sincere apology expressed in the Diet to all of those who were victims' and to continue to address those affected in a spirit of reconciliation".

Amnesty International welcomes House Resolution 124 in the Philippines as part of a growing international call for justice for the victims of Japan's military sexual slavery system. The organization strongly urges you to take steps to put House Resolution 124 to a vote in the Foreign Affairs Committee with the necessary quorum as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

Sam Zarifi
Director, Asia Pacific Programme