



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

### **Written statement\* submitted by The Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan, a non- governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[20 August 2020]

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\* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

GE.20-12255(E)



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The movement for resolution of the Japanese military sexual slavery issue has been a transnational women's movement, providing a space for women to speak their untold experiences and to raise awareness on issues of women's rights during Japanese colonization and sexual violence in conflict. The movement supported victims to transform into activists and enabled the international community to understand issues of military sexual slavery and wartime sexual violence as human rights violations and universal human rights issue.

However, after the victim-survivor and human rights activist Lee Yong-soo's press conference on May 7, 2020, the Korean Council has been subject to indiscriminate attacks from both the Japanese and Korean right-wing media and far-right historical revisionists. Although the movement has faced backlashes from the Japanese right wing in the past 30 years, since May the backlashes – now combined with words taken out of contexts from a victim and political agenda of the conservative groups – have escalated profoundly.

The conservative media particularly continue to raise groundless accusations, release distorted reports, and spread fraudulent news to fundamentally undermine the value and meaning of the movement.<sup>1</sup> Some historical revisionists in the Republic of Korea deny not only the movement but also the very existence of Japanese military sexual slavery victims, continue to circulate hate speech about survivors and activists, and interrupt with the Wednesday Demonstration that has called for peace and human rights since 1992. Historical revisionists in Japan seek to take advantage of the situation to further distort and attack the Japanese military sexual slavery issue, as they:

- 1) Attack the movement of the Korean Council through misrepresenting minor errors in National Tax Service Reporting<sup>2</sup> as “corruption” or “misappropriation”, and continuously spread groundless suspicions to degrade the meaning of the movement for Japanese military sexual slavery issue.
- 2) Distort the contexts of the victims' courageous testimonies through claiming that victims' testimonies were “instructed”, qualify them as “liars” and attempt to silence the victims again with hate speech.
- 3) Deny war crimes committed by the Japanese Government, evade responsibilities, and reproduce imperialism, colonialism, militarism, ethnic and gender discrimination, which were the root causes of the Japanese military sexual slavery issue.

Such attacks can also be found in letters submitted by Japanese right-wing organizations to the United Nations, most recently at the Human Rights Council 44th session.<sup>3</sup> These letters aim to create a schism between the survivors and activists, disrupt the movement, and distort public opinion on the issue. They are an attempt to undermine civil society organizing.

These allegations are found to be untrue or exaggerated, as the Press Arbitration Commission has ordered 11 of 13 articles to be deleted or publish corrections following the Korean Council's request for arbitration. The Korean Council shall continue to seek corrections, while continuing genuine conversations with victims and seeking ways to improve communication with the public. The Korean Council has met with Lee Yong-soo to discuss how to continue the movement forward and to collaborate with various local civic groups, and formed the Introspection and Vision Committee, joined by researchers, activists, and experts of various fields, to review the activities and provide detailed measures to improve the organization.

While expressing concern about the current malicious media coverage and attacks of the historical revisionists, we reiterate that the fundamental responsibility for the situation lies

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<sup>1</sup> Since July, 2020, the Press Arbitration Committee of the Republic of Korea has ordered the conservative media (including Chosun Ilbo, Chosun Biz, JoonAng Ilbo, New Daily, Seoul Economic Daily, Korea Economic Daily, Kookmin Ilbo, etc.) to delete, edit, or publish corrections of the “false” reports.

<sup>2</sup> On May 12, 2020, the National Tax Service (NTS) in the Republic of Korea stated that “there were no intentional manipulations or tax evasions to be suspected”, despite some minor reporting mistakes.

<sup>3</sup> A Deceitful Korean Citizens' Group (NGO) and the Comfort Women Issue(2020), URL: [https://i-rich.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/HRC\\_44\\_NGO\\_JSHT\\_item4\\_En.pdf](https://i-rich.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/HRC_44_NGO_JSHT_item4_En.pdf).

with the Government of Japan.<sup>4</sup> However, the Japanese Government has evaded and abandoned its responsibility to make reparations instead by using the term “consolation fund”, and abused monetary measures to silence the victims and movement, in its attempts with the Asian Women’s Fund in 1995 and 2015 “Comfort Women” Agreement.<sup>5</sup>

The Korean Government also has not fully represented the call for justice. In 2017, the Foreign Ministry under the Moon Jae-in administration announced the Task Force Report on the 2015 Agreement to admit that the agreement was irrational, and further disbanded the Reconciliation and Healing Foundation established by the agreement. However, concrete follow-up actions to return the 8 million USD to the Japanese Government and establish a government-funded foundation to investigate the issue have not taken place yet. As per the Supreme Court of the Republic of Korea ruling in 2011, the Korean Government has responsibilities to take proactive actions for resolution of the Japanese military sexual slavery issue.

The United Nations Human Rights Council and various treaty bodies have repeatedly noted that the Japanese military “comfort women” system was a military sexual slavery system operated and managed by the Japanese military, and thus the Japanese Government is obligated to carry out its legal responsibilities.<sup>6</sup> After the 2015 Agreement, further recommendations urged the Japanese Government to “ensure a lasting solution to the issue of comfort women with a victim-centred approach.”<sup>7</sup> Despite these calls for justice from the international community, the historical revisionists continue to deny the Japanese military sexual slavery issue, ignoring and undermining the countless recommendations from the United Nations.

Therefore, we request your assistance in communicating concern to the Governments of Japan and the Republic of Korea on the backlash towards the movement for justice for survivors of Japanese military sexual slavery and the continued failure by both governments to implement the many recommendations made by United Nations human rights bodies. We also recognize that victims of Japanese military sexual slavery are alive in or came from many countries throughout Asia Pacific region, and the failure to resolve this issue impacts survivors and their families across the region.

The Korean Council has actively worked to support victims of Japanese military sexual slavery and sexual violence in conflict and to achieve women’s rights and peace. In the past 30 years, concern and support from the international community allowed the Japanese military sexual slavery issue develop into an international human rights issue. We urge the international community to continue to pay due attention to the Japanese military sexual slavery issue and its movement for just resolution, amidst the backlash and attacks.

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<sup>4</sup> Korean civil society has called for the Japanese Government to 1) admit its war crimes, 2) investigate the truth, 3) make official apology, 4) make legal reparations, 5) punish the responsible, 6) record the issue in history textbooks and educate, and 7) commemorate victims and establish archives. The 7 Demands of the Wednesday Demonstration for Resolution of the Japanese Military Sexual Slavery Issue.

<sup>5</sup> A bilateral agreement contrary to the recommendations of many human rights bodies made between the governments of the Republic of Korea and Japan to silence the issue.

<sup>6</sup> E/CN.4/1996/53/Add.1; E/CN.4/Sub.2/2000/21.

<sup>7</sup> CERD/C/JPN/CO/10-11; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2016), Eleonara Zielinska, Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and practice, Pablo de Greiff, Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence; Juan E. Mendez, Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, URL: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=17209&LangID=E>.