

Chapter 4: Breakthrough at the UN Second Mission (July 2015)

B. An anxious speech in French

By Sugita Mio



Work upon work for a speech spoken in French

In order to participate in the pre-session of the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to be held in Geneva, I left Kansai International Airport, alone, at midnight on July 25, 2015. It was a long flight by Emirates, taking well over ten hours, via Dubai.

I was allowed only two minutes for my speech at the pre-session. This time, I was to make a speech, not in English, but in French. (I was glad that I had started studying French in February.)

Besides the speech in French, I was given opportunities to speak in English for ten minutes, respectively, at a conference and a symposium hosted by people living in Geneva and I was totally absorbed in preparing myself for the occasions, sincerely longing to disseminate “the truth about Japan” to the world.

With the help of my French teacher, I wrote my speech, busily consulting a dictionary. Such terms as “comfort women” and “forced abduction” are rarely used in daily conversation and I found writing the speech much harder than I had expected. Finally, the completed speech was read aloud by my native French teacher, which I recorded on my iPhone. During my entire flight to Geneva, I kept listening to the recorded speech.

I arrived at Geneva, just before noon, on July 26. I managed to travel from the airport to

the hotel on my own and checked in. At three in the afternoon, I was to meet a local Japanese lady named Arimura Sakura, who would take care of me during my stay. Ms. Arimura lives in the city and she is very talented and fluent both in French and English. She looked through the speech I had prepared and said, “I think it would be good if we change some parts so that people living here will understand what you really mean.” So, we tried to rewrite the speech from scratch.

After we finished writing the speech, we had it printed and made twenty copies of it to be distributed to the Committee members. The hotel people were very nice and helpful as to do all this work for us free of charge.

With the final speech ready, I had to now practice pronunciation. Although my strenuous practice listening to the recording on the iPhone during the flight turned out to be useless, I did my best to practice the new speech with Ms. Arimura’s help.

We started our meeting at three in the afternoon and it was already nine in the evening when we finished my speech practice. I thanked Ms. Arimura from the bottom of my heart for her dedication and we parted. I realized then that I had not eaten since I arrived at Geneva. But I was not hungry at all. Instead of an appetite for food, a keen sleepiness caught up with me and I fell asleep, with my iPhone in my hand. Ms. Arimura had recorded the speech in French on my iPhone for me.

It was three in the morning when I woke up. Although I felt jet-lagged, I resumed speech practice with as much concentration as I could muster.

I was to meet the other members of the mission at seven in the morning. The meeting place was another hotel about ten minutes’ walk from mine. I really felt relieved to see Mr. Okano, vice-president of the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform, and Ms. Yamamoto, president of Japanese Women for Justice and Peace.

Then, all of us went to UN European headquarters. It was about ten minutes’ ride on the tram, without transferring, to the UN. All I did during my stay in the beautiful City of Geneva was to take a trip between the UN and my hotel aboard Tram #15. I had no time at all for sightseeing.

My speech in French

Speeches at the pre-session were to start at 11:30 on the first day of the session. It took us some time to follow the necessary procedure for entering the UN building. (Europeans or Americans at the reception desk do their business in their own way, quite indifferent to whether there is a long line of people waiting at the entrance.) Having lingered at the entrance, we had less time left to prepare for the speech. Besides attending the pre-session, we organized a PR event called “*Japanology*,” using a borrowed conference room within the UN building to present Japanese culture to foreigners. We hardly finished setting up the *Japanology* exhibit when the time came for the pre-session of the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. So, all of us hurried to the conference hall designated for the session.

At the pre-session, no photographing or filming was permitted and the news media were not allowed to enter either.

Hours starting at 11:30 were designated for the session focusing on Japan and there were seven members of the Committee at the session. To be impartial, no Japanese was included among the seven Committee members. The participating NGOs were all Japanese. They were from the Japan Federation of Bar Associations and Japan’s Treaty for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. All of them, except us, seemed to be regulars at the session and they had longer time allotted for their speech, five to six minutes for each NGO. As I mentioned earlier, Ms. Yamamoto of Japanese Women for Justice and Peace and I each had only two minutes to speak. I was told that a request had been made, beforehand, to treat all the participating NGOs equally, but the request had been turned down. We couldn’t change our circumstance since we were newcomers without a significant record.

Since I had only two minutes, I focused on explaining that “there was no forced abduction of comfort women.” To my great relief, I somehow made myself understood in French.

The speech I gave in French was as follows:

My name is Sugita Mio. I was formerly a representative of Japan’s Diet. Today, I would like to share with you what I think is the core of the Comfort Women issue.

The point of contention about the Comfort Women issue is whether the Japanese

Imperial Army forcibly took women to warfront comfort stations.

I can definitely state that no historical evidence can be found anywhere in Japan that supports the notion that “the Japanese Imperial Army forcibly mobilized women and made them sex slaves,” as is now popularly believed overseas.

The claim that “women were forcibly driven out of their homes and taken away” was based on a story fabricated by a Japanese writer named Yoshida Seiji.

A leading Japanese newspaper, the Asahi Shimbun, which is also well known throughout the world, repeated this false story for as long as thirty-two years as a true historical fact.

However, on August 5, 2014, the Asahi Shimbun, after checking their reporting related to the comfort women, acknowledged that Yoshida’s testimony was merely a lie, and went on to report their finding as special featured articles.

Nonetheless, at present, it is widely believed worldwide that Japan once used women as “sex slaves”, which is held up as an atrocious crime equal to that of the Holocaust, committed by the German Nazis.

I loudly proclaim that this accusation is totally groundless and untrue.

After my speech, one of the Committee members said to us, “I heard for the first time a view quite opposite to what the world-wide media have told us so far. I wonder if what you just said is true. I like to know the evidential grounds.”

Clearly, the Committee member was perplexed. They have been told for decades that “Japan committed atrocious crimes against comfort women” by Japanese NGOs, and now we have given them a view that is 180-degrees. The very question raised by one Committee member led to the question to be presented to the Japanese government.

Ms. Yamamoto Yumiko’s speech

Ms. Yamamoto gave a two-minute speech in English. Her speech was:

I am very honored to speak to you today about what many Japanese women think

about the current controversies regarding Comfort Women.

Japan's war-related claims and reparations have been fully settled by laws and international agreements, yet many Human Rights Committees demand compensations and apologies from Japan.

This triggers political campaigns to dishonor Japan and causes human rights violations against Japanese.

For example, in the U.S., there are comfort woman statues and monuments, engraved with words stating that "comfort women were 200,000 women and girls abducted and forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese Imperial Army."

These places became focal points for anti-Japan demonstrations, which lead to the bullying of Japanese children, and community harmony and peace have been disrupted.

There are more plans to plant statues in the U.S., Canada, and Australia despite the fact that Japanese residents strongly protest such plans.

The comfort women issue is now used, not to promote women's human rights, but as a political campaign to condemn the Japanese nation in foreign countries.

There are serious, real violations of human rights, such as human trafficking of young girls, forced prostitution in poverty, and sexual slavery by terrorists.

We, Japanese women, would like you to look at the comfort women issue based on ALL the verified facts so that we can move on to concentrate our efforts to solve current violations of women's human rights.

Thank you.

Public views in Europe are similar to those in the U.S.

On the afternoon of the first day, Mr. Tony Marano and a university student named Ms. Mizuta Yasumi spoke during our event called "Japanology". Ms. Mizuta's speech attracted much attention on the Internet and I was very much moved when she said, "Let

us be proud of our Japanese origin.” It was a wonderful message representing what many Japanese youths feel.

After the busy first day at the UN was over, at seven in the evening, we had preliminaries for the conference scheduled for the next day at another hotel (the Franton Hotel) in the city. For this conference, Ms. Arimura Sakura had put an announcement of the event in newspapers in Geneva (nearly ten of them), inviting citizens to join us. With hungry stomachs and sleepy eyes, we continued our preliminaries until ten at night.

After much hard work, we went to a restaurant famous for its Swiss cheese fondue, joining our group which had already started dinner. The cheese fondue was delicious.

On July 28, the next day, we met at eight in the morning and went to UN headquarters together. In the conference room for the “*Japanology*” event, all of us participated in a panel discussion in the morning. Even during the event, we were busy going through the speeches for the evening conference and while eating lunch, I was busy brushing up my English. Hardly anytime to relax, alas!

In the afternoon session of the *Japanology* event, I gave a ten-minute speech in English. As I had plenty time to speak, I explained the three lies which Koreans claim as true, 1) twenty-thousand young girls 2) were forcibly abducted by the Japanese Imperial Army and 3) were made sex slaves, and also the process by which the Kono Statement came to be. Among the audience were Chinese media people, but there was a small audience. I could speak in a relaxed manner, thinking it was a kind of rehearsal for the evening event.

The evening conference went quite well. Ms. Arimura Sakura served as moderator and the speakers were Mr. Tony Marano, Mr. Fukiki Shunichi, Ms. Yamamoto Yumiko and I. It was regrettable that there were only a small number of participants. Still, it was larger than last year’s.

My English speech left much to be desired and I simply hated myself for the miserable result. In spite of my self-criticism, the audience raised an important question: “When there are so many comfort women statues in the U.S., why is it that the Japanese government keeps reticent about this?”

To the question, I answered, “That is because the Japanese government sticks to the policy that they don’t make historical matters political issues.” This was the same answer that the Japanese Foreign Ministry gave to me, when I asked the same question during a Diet session. I could not help but feel ashamed for my answer.

I asked Ms. Arimura how and why claims made by China and South Korea are favorably accepted in Europe.

Ms. Arimura’s answer was: “Public views in Europe are similar to those in the U.S. Major American newspapers report only Chinese and Korean assertions. That is the reason. Many Europeans read *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* and they believe what they read is true without realizing that it all comes from what Chinese and Koreans say.” Here, it is very clear that we, Japanese, are total losers when it comes to psychological warfare.

At our conference were a reporter from the *Sankei Shimbun* London office, who covered our UN speeches, and the *Yomiuri Shimbun* chief of the Geneva office. Only the *Sankei Shimbun* reported our activities in Geneva.

After it was all over, we had dinner together. Beer was served in tower-like glasses. Alas, Swiss beer was not as cool and nice as we would have liked.

Listening to a *Manyoshu* lecture in Geneva

Finally, the last day of our UN mission arrived. In the morning, I participated in a panel discussion about the Comfort Women issue, just as I did on the previous day.

In the afternoon, I listened with much interest to a *Manyoshu* lecture entitled *Ancient Japanese Women’s Social Participation and their Intellectual Assets*.

The UN has a Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. In Europe and America, it is still generally believed that ever since ancient times, Japan has been a country where men are respected and women, with very low social status, are despised.

In fact, quite the contrary--in Japan since archaic times, women have held high social

status and prestige, and played a very important part in politics, culture and everyday life. For example, Murasaki Shikibu and Sei Shonagon are the world's most ancient female authors. *Manyoshu* (*Collection of the Ten Thousand Leaves*) was compiled as early as the eighth century and contains many poems crafted by women. Such a country can be found nowhere else in the world.

Incidentally, my name, Mio, (literally meaning “water route”) is taken from *Manyoshu*. I felt a special bond, listening to this *Manyoshu* lecture.

After events were over as scheduled, we put the room back in order and went out to an Italian restaurant near the hotel to celebrate together. After the party, Mr. Okano, Ms. Yamamoto, Mr. Fujiki, Mr. Fujii and Mr. Marano left Geneva for UNESCO in Paris.

On July 30, having finished all of our scheduled work, the rest of us went home to Japan.

Running about, explaining to the government and the Foreign Ministry

On July 30, the same day we returned to Japan, the Committee for Elimination of Discrimination against Women quickly summarized the pre-session and presented the “List of Issues” to the Japanese government. This time, the List contained a new question which had never been asked before:

The Committee has been informed that “there was no evidence to prove the alleged forced abduction of comfort women” through an official statement submitted during the latest pre-session of the Committee. Regarding this, explain [the Japanese government's] view.

Clearly, the speeches we gave at the pre-session affected the “List of Issues”. To the question raised, the Japanese government needs to submit their response to the main session, to be held in February 2016.

If the Japanese government states that “there was no evidence to prove the forced abduction of comfort women,” the misconceived comfort women will no longer be a controversial issue.

The first Abe Cabinet decided that “there was no evidence to indicate the forced

abduction of comfort women.” Furthermore, Prime Minister Abe said in his statement commemorating the 70th anniversary of the end of the War, “We must not leave a legacy of continuously apologizing for the past to our children, grandchildren and children of the ensuing generations.”

However, the Japanese government keeps saying the following in their reports to the Committee:

- 1) On all occasions, the Japanese government has expressed its heart-felt apology and regret toward former comfort women.
- 2) Asian Women’s Fund (AWF) was established and compensation of two million yen per person is being paid.
- 3) Consecutive Prime Ministers, representing the Japanese government, on their own, wrote letters of apology and introspection and sent the letters directly to former comfort women.

Also, when they prepare the report to be submitted to the UN, they will be subject to surveillance by the surveillance task force of the Gender Equality Council. Hearing of well-informed people conducted by this task force often invites members of NGOs who attended the sessions of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

Considering all these factors, it is not so simple and easy to declare unwaveringly a denial of “forced abduction”.

So, we visited important people in the government and explained our speeches at the pre-session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, recently held in Geneva, and how the “List of Issues” came to be, reflecting our view. Though we had only limited time, we managed to have them understand the UN situation and they promised us to see to it that the government, not the Foreign Ministry, will be fully responsible for making the final observation to be submitted to the UN in response to the “List of Issues”.

Then, we went to the Foreign Ministry and met those in charge of the matter, to whom we were introduced through the Prime Minister’s official residence. We explained the situation as we had done to the government people. Their response was: “We understand what you are trying to tell us, but we must be open to various views from various

sectors.” It was the usual bland answer, just as we had anticipated.

Nightmarish struggle at the UN Human Rights Council

On September 8, a meeting was held in Tokyo to report on our activities at the UN. At the meeting, a group of people who were going to Geneva to proclaim to the world the truth about Okinawa expressed their firm determination to act for the cause, as a counter to Okinawa Prefecture Governor Onaga Takeshi, who was to speak at the United Nations Human Rights Council.

Besides this delegation, it was decided that I was to go to the UN under a different schedule to speak about the comfort women problem. At this point, I was the only one to go to Geneva and speak.

In the meantime, among those who were going to the UN Human Rights Council, a mailing list was made and information was exchanged. However, even when the time for departure neared, we were not informed of any details by the NGO in charge of overall preparation.

Around that time, news arrived that quite possibly the Korean Council for Addressing the Volunteers Corps (*Chong Dae Hyup*), accompanying former comfort women over the age of ninety, planned to travel across Europe for eighteen nights and nineteen days, promoting the comfort women issue and at the end of the month might visit the UN in Geneva. I uploaded this news to the mailing list. Mr. Fujiki, secretariat of Texas Daddy, offered to go with me, acting as a “bouncer.”

On September 9, we arrived at Geneva, three hours behind schedule, partly due to airplane troubles. The first thing the next morning, we went to the UN and confirmed under which item I was to speak. I was assigned to the item to discuss human rights problems in Sri Lanka. (By the way, Governor Onaga and our delegation from Okinawa were assigned to the “Minority” item.) The man in charge of the NGO who had secured a seat for me to speak explained: “As Sri Lanka is a poor country, there will not be many speakers who come from Sri Lanka. So, there will be plenty time left and you can use it to speak. It is quite alright if you speak about things different from what you have submitted to the secretariat. You can even mention the comfort women problem.”

Hearing him, I felt really dubious, wondering: “Is it really possible to speak about the

comfort women under this item? I don't think it appropriate to speak under Sri Lanka's human rights issue. When I submitted the draft of the speech I had prepared in Japan to the secretariat, just as I had feared, I was told, "You cannot make this speech here."

All was done for! I cannot speak here. For what, then, did I come all the way to Geneva? I was caught by total helplessness.

I contacted supporters in Japan and explained the situation. How was I going to spend the rest of my trip? I was desperate. Then, suddenly, an idea struck me.

"Is Ms. Coomaraswamy, who wrote the *Coomaraswamy Report*, Sri Lankan?"

Based on the verification of the Kono Statement and the *Asahi Shimbun's* corrected articles, the Japanese government asked Ms. Coomaraswamy to correct her report last year. So far, she has not responded. How about speaking on this issue?

I immediately went back to hotel and wrote a speech in Japanese from scratch. Then, Mr. Fujiki and Ms. Arimura Sakura, a local resident, who helped me a lot previously, translated my speech into English. I had two minutes to speak, just like last time. It took much longer than I thought to make it into a two-minute speech in English. It was after two in the morning that we finally finished writing the speech.

The next morning, I submitted the draft of this speech to the secretariat. "This is fine." Thus, our speech was accepted without a problem.

Now began my struggle with English. Ms. Arimura and Mr. Fujiki gave me very strict, special training. Originally, I was to speak under the Item starting at three on the afternoon of the 30th, but the preceding discussion took longer than scheduled and the time for the speech was carried over to the next morning session at 10:00. That evening, we had a quick supper and spent the rest of the evening practicing the speech.

On the following morning, the names of the speakers were posted in the conference hall. I was the 53rd speaker. Until my turn came, I spent my time checking my speech. I was very nervous waiting for my turn.

11:40 A.M. It was my turn at last. The moment I started speaking, I felt the air in the

hall change a little. There was something uneasy. I don't know what caused that uneasiness. "What, on earth, is she talking about?" "Why is she making such a speech here?" Maybe, this is what the uneasiness meant.

My entire speech

Here is my speech in full.

Thank you very much Madam Vice President,

The UN Human Rights Commission Report on Comfort Women issue, commonly called the "Coomaraswamy Report," declares Comfort Women as "sex slaves".

The conclusion of this report was based on two sources: first, the testimonies of former Comfort Women; second, the confession of Seiji Yoshida on his involvement in forced mobilization of Korean women.

However, both of these sources have been discredited and disproved.

Several former comfort women confessed to Professor An Byong-jik of Seoul University and Professor Sarah Soh of San Francisco State University that they lied to the Sri Lankan UN Special Rapporteur, Ms. Coomaraswamy.

Chong Dae Hyup, an organization under North Korean influence, confined these women in a house and trained them to acknowledge that they were abducted by Japanese Army.

The second source of Ms. Coomaraswamy's conclusion was Mr. Yoshida's book, "My War Crime". Mr. Yoshida admitted that he fabricated his story in an effort to sell more books.

However, it had been diffused as historical fact by the Asahi Newspaper for 32 years. However, Asahi admitted last August that its articles were false, retracted them and published an official apology.

The Japanese government has adopted a Cabinet decision affirming "no evidence of forcible mobilization of Comfort Women was found."

Moreover, the US Army Report No. 49 issued in 1944 clearly stated that “Comfort Women were well paid prostitutes” indicating they were not “sex slaves” deprived of freedom.

Based on the UN report, Koreans and Chinese have been placing Comfort Women statues and monument in several nations.

In those cities, many incidences of bullying of Japanese children have been reported. Such human rights violation should not be overlooked.

We would like you to withdraw the “Coomaraswamy Report,” then consider the human rights of those who have been victimized by this political propaganda campaign.

Madam Vice President, we urge the United Nations and Sri Lankan government to conduct a further investigation based on documented historical evidence without preconceived bias.

We are prepared to cooperate with your investigations.

I thank you very much.

Sure percussions and new development

Having finished my speech, we had coffee at a café in the basement, when a reporter talked to us.

“I heard your speech.”

He was a Pakistani reporter, stationed at the UN. He said with a smile, “I don’t like China.” We talked with him for a while and exchanged our name cards and parted.

Later, he called my office and also e-mailed me. “I want to write an article about your speech and I want you to send me your draft. Also, I want to know more about the Coomaraswamy report.” In response, I e-mailed the draft of my speech and the URL about the Coomaraswamy report.

He introduced my response on overseas media called Bolan Times International (<http://www.bolantimes.com/urge-for-further-investigate-for-coomaraswamy-report/>).

He also contacted Mr. Fujiki, secretariat Texas Daddy, and a new development began.

He wrote, “The article is very well received, with many access counts to it. In particular, the largest access counts are from the U.S. and South Korea. Seeing these reactions, I am very confident that what you assert is in the right. In March next year, we are going to hold a symposium for reporters from countries across the world. Won’t you come and speak for us?”

We proclaim the truth to the world. If we continue moving forward with the right cause, a new path like this will surely open for us. I have unwavering determination to tackle this problem.