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National Action to Abolish the Comfort Women Act

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OPEN LETTER

Our standpoint on the statue erected in Mitte Borough, Berlin

On September 28, an unveiling ceremony for a comfort woman statue, the so-called “Statue of Peace,” was held in Mitte Borough, Berlin, Germany. Later, on October 7, the mayor of Mitte Borough, who saw the inscription on the pedestal of the statue as questionable, revoked approval and ordered the statue removed by October 14. The Mitte council, however, met opposition from the Korea Verband, a local citizens’ group, and halted removal of the statue, pending a judicial decision on the matter. As we have brought up the facts surrounding the comfort women issue and raised questions on this issue, we feel perplexed given the response of the Mitte Borough council. The key issue is that this comfort woman statue, named “Peace”, is a result of distorted historical facts. We explain our reasoning:

1. The Japanese army did not forcibly transport Korean women

The statue erected in the Mitte Borough, Berlin, Germany, as a so-called “Statue of Peace”, is a statue of a prostitute, the oldest profession in human history. Prostitutes sink into a den of iniquity of their making or, as with most, due to poverty. Most of the Japanese army Korean comfort women of the Pacific War period ended up as prostitutes at the hands of vile criminals via fraud, playing on their desire for public service and because of hunger and poverty. Korean women were sent not only to comfort stations in war zones, but also to brothels at home and abroad by means both fair and foul. At the end of the day, unscrupulous brokers exploited Korean women for money. It should not be forgotten that some Korean women who were “taken away” also wanted to make money.

What army is it that specifically fools women into following them for money? Even the collection of testimonies (1) issued by the Korean Council for Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan stated, “None of the military documents discovered so far gives a specific explanation about how comfort women were mobilized.” The 1996 UN Radhika Coomaraswamy Report stated, “The most problematic aspect of attempting to write an account of the recruitment of military sexual slaves during the period leading up to the Second World War and during the war itself is the lack of remaining or disclosed official documentation concerning the actual recruitment process.”

The claim that the Japanese army forcibly transported Korean women is absolutely not true.

2. Comfort women are not Japanese army sex slaves

The 1996 UN Radhika Coomaraswamy Report states, “The rationale behind the establishment of a formal system of comfort stations was that such an institutionalized and, therefore, controlled prostitution service would reduce the number of rape reports in areas where the army was based.” This “institutionalized prostitution service” refers to legalized prostitution of the time and a comfort station was a space where this legal prostitution took place. That is, a comfort station was a space in which the master, or “employer,” of comfort women offered these women to the Japanese army as commodities to make a profit and Japanese army soldiers were “consumers” who paid the prescribed charges by rank and time to satiate their sexual desires at comfort stations. Japanese army soldiers were unable to enter comfort stations unless they paid a significant amount of their pay, for a brief period of time, based on comfort station regulations. They could not use comfort stations unless they had both money and time and were absolutely not allowed to treat comfort women as they pleased or to abuse them. The only people forcing “comfort women” to do anything were comfort station owners, who paid money in advance to buy these women for their future services, and not the Japanese army.

Therefore, calling comfort women Japanese army sex slaves is a lie.

3. Comfort women are not war crime victims

The 1998 UN McDougall Report states, “Acts of sexual violence, including rape, when committed by enemy or occupying forces during the course of an international conflict, may constitute grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions.” What the Report defines as a war crime is “sexual violence, including rape, committed against local women in an area of an international conflict.” YOON Mi-hyang, a member of Parliament currently under criminal investigation in South Korea for a number of charges including misappropriation of funds, says that the purpose of the establishment of comfort stations of the Japanese army was “to prevent wartime violence such as abduction and rape in occupied areas and it is intended for preventing sexually-transmitted diseases in soldiers and raising their moral.” That is, comfort stations were legal facilities for prostitution used to prevent war crimes which could have occurred, such as abduction, rape and murder, of local women by occupation soldiers. Referring to women working in facilities established for this purpose as war crime “victims” is logically inconsistent. What is more, most comfort women who worked in these facilities came from other countries, other than Korea, to make money. Thus, the nature of the Japanese military comfort stations is not at all consistent with so-called war crimes.

Therefore, comfort women are not victims of Japanese army war crimes.

Lastly, it is not true that Ms. KIM Hak-sun, referred to as one of the “survivors who broke their silence on 14 August 1991” in the inscription, was forcibly taken by the Japanese army or lived the life of a sex slave. Ms. KIM, who was born in Jilin Province, Manchuria in 1924, was sold for 40 yen by her foster father to train as a *kisaeng*, or woman who provided entertainment to men of the upper class, at the age of 15. Her foster father sent her to Pyongyang Kisaeng Academy to give her *kisaeng* training for two years and then they traveled around the country seeking business opportunities. However, this was not successful due to her young age and in the end he went to China.

Ms. KIM, was taken to Beijing, China by her foster father. She later stated that she was then abducted by an officer with two stars on his uniform and soldiers, which is hard to believe. At that time, in 1991, reports said that “her foster father who took her there did not receive any money from the Japanese soldiers and she was taken by force of arms” and there was an account that “her foster father, who intended to use his foster daughters to ‘do business’ with the Japanese army, was threatened at the point of the bayonet and he just handed her over to the Japanese army, without getting a penny.” Based on these stories, I presume that the people who took Ms. KIM were not Japanese military personnel. No army anywhere, regardless of the country, traffic women. In 1991, newspapers reported that, “KIM *Halmoni* was taken as a comfort woman in the spring 1940, when she was 16. She lost her father when she was little and her mother married a second time. KIM *Halmoni* was adopted by a family in Pyongyang when she was 13, finished Pyongyang Kisaeng

Academy and was taken, together with another foster daughter, by her foster father to central China, where the Sino-Japanese War was on-going.” This clearly shows that she was taken by her foster father. More than anything, no part of her own testimony stated that she was forcibly taken by the Japanese army.

Therefore, calling Ms. KIM a victim of the Japanese army is a distortion of facts.

As described above, the Korea Verband’s claim that Japanese military comfort women were “forcibly transported by the Japanese army and made into sex slaves of the Japanese army to be victims of a war crime” distorts the facts of the comfort women. Accordingly, the inscription below is a fabrication that clearly distorts the facts of the comfort women: “During World War II, the Japanese military abducted countless girls and women from across the Asia-Pacific region and forced them into sexual slavery. The “Statue of Peace” commemorates the suffering of these so-called comfort women. It honors the courage of the survivors who broke their silence on 14th August 1991, and are seeking to prevent the repeat of such atrocities worldwide.”

Given the current circumstance, we, the Korean History Textbook Research Institute and the National Action to Abolish the Comfort Women Act, would like to state the following to the Mitte council of Berlin, to the people of Germany and to the people around the world:

1. We must face the fact that the “Statue of Peace” is a symbol of a distortion resulting from a combination of distorted facts and fabricated stories of comfort women on the part of the Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance;
2. The mayor of Mitte Borough must immediately have the so-called “Statue of Peace” removed to end the lies;
3. We hope that the German people will see the historical facts concerning the Japanese military comfort women, which is in fact the only way to eliminate the diplomatic war between Japan and South Korea, and to a real “peace” between the two countries.

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The President of the Korean History Textbook Research Institute