

RECENT POLICY OF THE GOVERNMENT OF JAPAN
ON THE ISSUE KNOWN AS "COMFORT WOMEN"

April, 2007

The Government of Japan had been conducting a thorough fact-finding study on the issue known as "comfort women" since December 1991 and announced its results in July 1992 and in August 1993. Public documents found as a result of such study are now open to the public at the Cabinet Secretariat. On the occasion of the announcement of the findings in 1993, then Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono released a statement and expressed in it sincere apologies and remorse, recognizing this issue was, with the involvement of the military authorities of the day, a grave affront to the honor and dignity of a large number of women. The Government of Japan has since expressed its sincere apologies and remorse to the former "comfort women" on many occasions.

Recognizing that the issue known as "comfort women" was a grave affront to the honor and dignity of a large number of women, the Government of Japan, together with the people of Japan, seriously discussed what could be done for expressing their sincere apologies and remorse to the former "comfort women." As a result, the Asian Women's Fund (AWF) was established on July 19, 1995 in order to extend atonement from Japanese people to the former "comfort women." Having decided to provide necessary assistance for the AWF by a Cabinet decision in August 1995, the Government of Japan, with a view to fulfilling its moral responsibility, had been providing all possible assistance for the AWF, including bearing the total operational costs of the AWF, assisting its fund-raising and providing the necessary funds to implement its activities (approximately 4.8 billion yen from the AWF's founding through fiscal year of 2005), in order for the AWF to attain its goals. The AWF disbanded in March 2007 with the termination of the project in Indonesia.

1. Cooperation for the Asian Women's Fund

The Government of Japan had been cooperating with the AWF in implementing the activities. And the atonement projects were completed in the Philippines, the Republic of Korea and Taiwan by the end of September 2002. Some of former comfort women who received atonement projects expressed their gratitude in various ways.

In addition, the AWF is implementing activities tailored to domestic conditions in the Netherlands and Indonesia as well. Activities in the Netherlands were completed successfully on 14 July 2001. Activities in Indonesia were completed successfully in March 2007.

(1) The Philippines, the Republic of Korea and Taiwan

The AWF makes it its principle to respect the intention of each of the aged former "comfort women" in the Philippines, the Republic of Korea and Taiwan where the identification processes of "comfort women" have been implemented by their Governments or organizations. Based upon such principle, the AWF, making use of the money donated by the Japanese people as its resource, provides the former "comfort women" with the atonement money which expresses the feeling of atonement by the Japanese people and, making use of the fund disbursed by the Government of Japan, implements medical and welfare support projects aimed at improving their medical and welfare condition. When the atonement money is provided, the Prime Minister, on behalf of the Government, sends a letter expressing apologies and remorse directly to each former "comfort woman." The details are as follows;

a. Letter from the Prime Minister of Japan

The Government of Japan has expressed its sincere apologies and remorse regarding the issue known as "comfort women" on various occasions.

When the atonement money and medical and welfare support project are provided, the Prime Minister, on behalf of the Government, sends a letter expressing apologies and remorse directly to each former "comfort woman."

b. Atonement from the Japanese People

The Government of Japan has been making great efforts to raise public awareness and gain a better understanding of the issue known as "comfort women." The Government has provided all possible assistance to the AWF for its fund raising from the public to express atonement to the former "comfort women."

As a result, a wide range of individuals, enterprises, labor unions, political parties, Diet members and Cabinet Ministers have shown their support for the aims of the AWF. A total amount donated to the AWF including contributions to its basic assets was approximately 600 million yen.

In July 1996, the AWF decided that the Fund would provide 2 million yen (the atonement money) to each former "comfort women" in the Republic of Korea, the Philippines and Taiwan from these contributions.

Together with the atonement money and the letter from the Prime Minister of Japan, a letter from the President of the AWF, explaining the purpose and expected result of the AWF's activities, and messages from the contributors are also conveyed to each all individual former "comfort women".

c. Medical and Welfare Support Projects funded by Governmental Resources

In order to fulfill its moral responsibility, the Government of Japan has decided to disburse about 700 million yen (settled amount of assistance: 510 million yen) from the national budget for the medical and welfare projects of the AWF to assist the former "comfort women" in the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, and Taiwan over a 5-year period.

Such plans as (i) the improvement of housing, (ii) nursing services and (iii) assistance in the provision of medical services and medicines are some examples of these projects. They are being carried out with the cooperation of the respective governments and authorities, and other relevant organizations, taking fully into account the actual circumstances of each of the former "comfort women."

(2) Indonesia

The Government of Japan and the AWF have explored the most appropriate project to be implemented in Indonesia in order to express atonement from the Japanese people. As a result, the AWF has decided to support a project proposed by the Government of Indonesia called the "Promotion of Social Welfare Services for Elderly People in Indonesia" through a fund disbursed by the Government of Japan. This decision was made partly because the Government of Indonesia found it difficult to identify the former "comfort women." In March 1997, the AWF concluded the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Government of Indonesia to provide financial support (380million yen over 10 years; settled amount of assistance: 367 million yen) to the project. In this project, new facilities will be built for the elderly who have no family or relatives to look after them and are unable to work due to illness or physical handicaps. These facilities will be annexed to the public homes for elderly run by the Department of Social Affairs.

The priority entrance into these facilities will be given to those who proclaim themselves as former "comfort women". The facilities will be established mainly in the regions where former "comfort women" are thought to live. In total, 69 social welfare facilities for elderly people have been established. One of the facilities establish in FY 2006 accommodated 14 former "comfort women".

(3) The Netherlands

The Government of Japan and the AWF, in consultation with the Dutch people concerned, had explored what appropriate project could be implemented in the Netherlands, where no authorities identify former "comfort women," in order to convey atonement from the Japanese people. As a result, on July 16, 1998, the AWF concluded a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Project Implementation Committee in the Netherlands (PICN) on a project concerning the issue known as "comfort women" aimed at helping to enhance the living conditions of those who suffered incurable physical and psychological wounds during World War II.

In accordance with the MOU, the AWF, making use of a fund disbursed by the Government of Japan, has provided the PICN with financial support totaling up to 255 million yen (settled amount of assistance: 245 million yen) over 3 years and the PICN has implemented the project for 79 recipients. This project was successfully completed on July 14, 2001.

(4) Programs Underscoring the Lessons of History

Recognizing the importance of passing on the facts related to this issue to future generations as a lesson of history in order to ensure that such an issue may never be repeated, the AWF, in cooperation with the Government of Japan, is actively compiling documents and materials relating to the issue known as "comfort women."

2. Efforts to Address Contemporary Issues Concerning the Honor and Dignity of Women

The Government of Japan considers that it is its responsibility to address contemporary issues related to women, such as violence against women. The Government of Japan is providing financial contributions to the AWF for its activities toward the solution of such issues.

In this context, the AWF has been actively implementing the following activities that will enhance understanding of contemporary women issues by the international community.

(1) The organization of international fora

(2) The provision of public relations support to other NGOs engaged in various contemporary issues on women through financial assistance.

(3) The initiation of research and fact-finding projects on contemporary women's human rights

problems, such as violence against women; their causes, and necessary counter-measures and policies.

(4) The initiation of projects to counsel the women who suffered from problems such as violence against women and to research and develop new counseling and mental care techniques to help improve the skills of counseling and health care professionals.

3. Discussions in International Human Rights Fora

In August 1997, the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities under the United Nations Commission on Human Rights adopted a resolution, as adopted by the Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, which recognized the above-mentioned measures implemented by the Government of Japan in cooperation with the AWF as "positive steps" towards the settlement of this issue. In addition, the Coomaraswamy Report of 1998 recognized the measures implemented by the Government of Japan in cooperation with the AWF as "welcome efforts." The Government of Japan believes that the international community has demonstrated a certain level of understanding towards its efforts concerning this issue. The implementation of these kinds of activities is also significant from the standpoint of enhancing international mutual understanding concerning contemporary issues regarding women.

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