

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Consideration of the seventh and eighth periodic reports

(February 16, 2016, Geneva)

(Summary of remarks by Mr. Shinsuke Sugiyama, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs
in the Question and Answer session)

The combined seventh and eighth periodic reports were considered by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on February 16, 2016 at the United Nations Office in Geneva. The summary of remarks by Mr. Shinsuke Sugiyama, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs in the Question and Answer session is as follows.

1. Domestic application of the Convention

(In answer to the questions from Mr. Bruun,)

Japan shall faithfully observe the treaties concluded by Japan and established rule of international law, based on Article 98-2 of the Constitution of Japan and considers that such treaties prevail over domestic laws.

2. Issue of comfort women

(In answer to the questions from Ms. Hofmeister,)

As stated in the written answer to the questions posed by the Committee, the Government of Japan conducted a full-scale fact-finding study on the comfort women issue in the early 1990s. That was when the issue started to be taken up as a political and diplomatic issue between Japan and the Republic of Korea. However, “forceful taking away” of comfort women by the military and government authorities could not be confirmed in any of the documents that the Government of Japan was able to identify in this study.

The reason behind the widespread belief that comfort women were “forcefully taken away” is a fabricated story by the late Seiji Yoshida in his book entitled “My War Crime” published in 1983. In this book, Yoshida illustrates himself hunting many women by order of the Japanese military in Jeju Island of the Republic of Korea. At the time, the content of his book was widely reported as if it were a true story by the Asahi Shimbun, a major Japanese newspaper. It eventually made a tremendous impact not only on public opinion in Japan and the Republic of Korea, but also in the entire international community. The reality is, Yoshida’s story has later been proven to be

entirely a product of imagination by scholars.

In fact, the Asahi Shimbun later published articles several times including on August 5 and 6, and later in September, 2014, admitted having published erroneous articles, and officially apologized for it to their readers.

The truth is that the figure “200,000 persons” as the number of comfort women also lacks concrete evidence. The Asahi Shimbun clarified in its article dated on August 5, 2014 that “‘Women volunteer corps’ refer to the ‘women volunteer labor corps’ that were organized to mobilize women as a work force during the war in Japan proper as well as in the former colonies on the Korean Peninsula and Taiwan” and that “With the objective of using the women as a work force, the corps were different from comfort women who were made to serve as sexual partners for military personnel.” The Asahi Shimbun admitted that the figure “200,000” which it had reported was originated from its confusion with comfort women of the Women Volunteer Corps who were mobilized as a war-time labor force.

I would also like to point out that the expression “sex slaves” contradicts the facts.

After intensive consultations between the Governments of Japan and the Republic of Korea on the issue of comfort women toward an early conclusion, as I explained earlier, the Foreign Ministers of both nations had a meeting on December 28 last year and reached an agreement on the issue. With this agreement, the two Governments confirmed that the issue of comfort women is resolved finally and irreversibly. Later on the same day, a phone call between the leaders of both nations was held and the leaders confirmed that both sides had reached an agreement and honored such development.

As I said at the outset, documents on this agreement between Japan and the Republic of Korea are attached with our written answer, thus, I will not repeat the detailed content of the agreement here.

What should be recognized is that the Government of Japan has been sincerely dealing with this issue through measures such as the Asian Women’s Fund even before the most recent agreement. Building on such experience and under the most recent

agreement, the following has been decided: first, the Government of the Republic of Korea establish a foundation for the purpose of providing support for the former comfort women; second, its funds of approximately 1 billion yen be contributed by the Government of Japan as a one-time contribution through its budget; and third, projects for recovering the honor and dignity and healing the psychological wounds of all former comfort women be carried out under the cooperation between the two Governments.

Each government is currently making efforts to faithfully implement the content of the agreement, and there is no change at all on this point. The understanding of the international community regarding such efforts by the two Governments would be very much appreciated. In this regard, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that the international community is now welcoming the agreement, as expressed by, for instance, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations.

I would like to add one more point. Ms. Hofmeister pointed out examples of other countries' situations. Regarding issues of reparations, property, and claims pertaining to the Second World War, including the point that Ms. Hofmeister pointed out, the Government of Japan concluded the *San Francisco Peace Treaty* with 45 countries, including the US, the UK, and France, and not only that, through bilateral treaties, agreements and instruments, which include the *Agreement on the Settlement of Problems Concerning Property and Claims and on Economic Co-operation between Japan and the Republic of Korea* and settlement between Japan and China. Based on these agreements, I will not go into the legal details, but, the Government of Japan's consistent position has been that we have dealt with these issues sincerely and that these issues had already been legally settled with the relevant parties to those agreements including issues of claims by individuals.

Although this issue had been legally settled, the Government of Japan established the Asian Women's Fund and carried out its projects using the budget of the Government of Japan and contributions from the people of Japan. I will not go into the details of the activities of the Asian Women's Fund, but, I believe that most of you here today are familiar with the story.

(In answer to the questions from Ms. Zou,)

I believe that if you read the documents attached with our written answer, it should be clear to you that the issue (of comfort women) is resolved finally and

irreversibly between Foreign Minister Kishida and Foreign Minister Yun on December 28 last year.

Therefore, I have to say that criticism such as comments that the Government of Japan denies historical fact or has not taken any measures related to this issue contradicts the facts.

I have explained that “forceful taking away” of comfort women could not be confirmed in our study, but in the agreement concluded by Foreign Minister Kishida, it says that, “The issue of comfort women, with an involvement of the Japanese military authorities at that time, was a grave affront to the honor and dignity of large numbers of women, and the Government of Japan is painfully aware of responsibilities.” This agreement also states that the Japanese Government expresses its most sincere apologies and remorse to all the women, and a foundation will be established, and its funds will be contributed by the Government of Japan, the amount of which is 1 billion Yen. Since we only have limited time, I will not go into the further details. As for the phrase “With an involvement of the Japanese military authorities at that time,” the Government of Japan has admitted that comfort stations were established in response to the request of the military authorities at that time, that the then Japanese military had been involved in the establishment and management of the comfort stations and the transfer of comfort women, and that the recruitment of the comfort women had been conducted by private recruiters who acted in response to the request of the military. Based on the above-mentioned facts, I gave an explanation earlier in order to clarify that the newspaper that published the article admitted that the number of 200,000 was completely mistaken, for example.

I also would like to reiterate that the expression “sex slave” contradicts the facts. It is also the case that the expression “sex slave” does not appear even once in the joint announcement by the Foreign Ministers of Japan and the Republic of Korea, which is attached with our written answer.

Therefore, highly regrettably, I must make it clear that the Government of Japan can not only accept any of the points made by Ms. Zou, but I also have to say that her statement contradicts the facts.

(Regarding the question by Ms. Zou on the agreement between Japan and the Republic

of Korea,)

The agreement that we provided to you is the agreement between Japan and the Republic of Korea and both governments of Japan and the Republic of Korea are currently making efforts to faithfully implement the content of the agreement. This has not changed at all. I would like to ask for your understanding on this point.

[END]