

On the Issue of Wartime "Comfort Women"

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Cabinet Councillors' Office on External Affairs

1. Study background

The issue of wartime "comfort women" has been attracting attention from both within and outside Japan, as actions have been brought to court in Japan by those concerned and the issue has been debated in the Diet.

During Prime Minister Miyazawa's visit to the Republic of Korea in January 1992, the issue was brought up in the meeting between the Prime Minister and then President, Mr. Roh Tae Woo, in which the Korean side requested strongly that relevant facts be brought to light. Other countries and areas concerned also have shown strong interest in this issue.

Under these circumstances, the Government of Japan, since December 1991, has been conducting a study by means of individual hearings of former military personnel and others concerned in parallel with a search for relevant documents. In addition, for five days from July 26 to 30, the Government of Japan conducted detailed regarding of former comfort women, with the cooperation of the Association of Pacific War Victims and Bereaved Families, in Seoul, the Republic of Korea, regarding the circumstances at the time. Furthermore, in the course of the study, government officials were sent to the United States to search for official U.S. documents and a field study was conducted in Okinawa as well. The following gives the details of the study, and a list of the documents discovered by the study is attached.

Institutions covered by the study: the National Police Agency; the Defense Agency; the Ministry of Justice; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Ministry of Education; the Ministry of Health and Welfare; the Ministry of Labor; the National Archives; the National Diet Library; and the U.S. National Archives.

People covered by individual hearings: former comfort women; former military personnel; former officials of the Government-General of Korea; former operators of comfort stations; residents in the areas where comfort stations were located; and history researchers, etc.

Domestic and foreign documents and publications used for reference: the study report compiled by the Government of the Republic of Korea; collections of testimonies by former comfort women, compiled by those concerned including the Association of Pacific War Victims and Bereaved Families and the Korean Council for the women Drafted for Sexual Slavery by Japan; and also practically all of the numerous Japanese publications on the subject matter were perused.

On July 6, 1992, the Government of Japan announced the results of its study on this issue conducted up to that time. In view of the further progress of the study since then, the Government has decided to announce the findings reached as below.

2. Facts on the Issue of Wartime "Comfort Women"

The following has been brought to light as a result of the aforementioned search for documents and individual hearings as well as comprehensive analysis and review of the various documents used as reference.

1) Background to the establishment of comfort stations:

The comfort stations were established in various locations in response to the request of the military authorities at the time. Internal government documents from those days cite as reasons for establishing comfort stations the need to prevent anti-Japanese sentiments from fermenting as a result of rapes and other unlawful acts by Japanese military personnel against local residents in the areas occupied by the then Japanese military, the need to prevent loss of troop strength by venereal and other diseases, and the need to prevent espionage.

2) Timing of the establishment of comfort stations

As some documents indicate that a comfort station was established in Shanghai at the time of the so-called Shanghai Incident in 1932 for the troops stationed there, it is assumed that comfort stations were in existence since around that time to the end of World War II. The facilities expanded in scale and in geographical scope later on as the war spread.

3) Areas with comfort stations

The countries or areas where it has been possible as a result of the study to confirm that comfort stations existed are: Japan; China; the Philippines; Indonesia; the then Malaya; Thailand; the then Burma; the then New Guinea; Hong Kong; Macao; and the then French Indochina.

4) Number of comfort women

It is virtually impossible to determine the total number of comfort women, as no document has been found which either indicates their total number or gives sufficient ground to establish an estimate. However, in view of the fact, as described above, that comfort stations were operated in extensive areas for long periods, it is apparent that there existed a great number of comfort women.

5) Comfort women's place of origin

The countries or areas from which it has been possible as a result of the study to confirm that comfort women came are: Japan; the Korean Peninsula; China; Taiwan; the Philippines; Indonesia; and the Netherlands. Apart from Japanese, many of the comfort women transferred to the war areas were from the Korean Peninsula.

6) Operation and management of comfort stations

Many comfort stations were run by private operators, although in some areas there were cases in which the then Japanese military directly operated comfort stations. Even in those cases where the facilities were run by private operators, the then Japanese military was involved directly in the establishment and management of the comfort stations by such means as granting permissions to open the facilities, equipping the facilities, drawing up the regulations for the comfort stations that set the hours of operation and tariff and stipulated such matters as precautions for the use of the facilities.

With regard to the supervision of the comfort women, the then Japanese military imposed such measures as mandatory use of contraceptives as a part of the comfort station regulations and regular check-ups of comfort women for venereal and other diseases by military doctors, for the purpose of hygienic control of the comfort women and the comfort stations. Some stations controlled the comfort women by restricting their leave time as well as the destinations they could go to during the leave time under the comfort station regulations. It is evident, at any rate, that, in the war areas, these women were forced to move with the military under constant military control and that they were deprived of their freedom and had to endure misery.

7) Recruitment of comfort women

In many cases private recruiters, asked by the comfort station operators who represented the request of the military authorities, conducted the recruitment of comfort women. Pressed by the growing need for more comfort women stemming from the spread of the war, these recruiters resorted in any cases to coaxing and intimidating these women to be recruited against their own will, and there were even cases where administrative/ military personnel directly took part in the recruitments.

8) Transportation of comfort women, etc.

When the recruiters had to transport comfort and other women by ship or other means of transportation, the then Japanese military approved requests for their travel by such means as regarding such women as having a special status similar to its civilian personnel serving in the military, and the Japanese Government issued certificates of identification. In quite a few cases the women were transported to the war areas by military ships and vehicles, and in some cases they were left behind in the confusion of the rout that ensued Japanese defeat.