Seoul Mayor says he won't cooperate with removal of comfort woman statue

Posted on : Oct.27,2016 17:27 KST Modified on : Oct.27,2016 17:27 KST 0

The 1,250th consecutive weekly Wednesday demonstration calling for a resolution to the comfort women issue, across from the Japanese embassy in Seoul, Sep. 28. (Yonhap News)

In meeting with civic group from the US, Park Won-soon says he won't cede to pressure from Japan

Seoul Mayor Park Won-soon sent a firm message on concerns that a statue symbolizing the comfort women may be taken down.

The Japanese government has been applying steady pressure for the statue's removal from its place in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul since reaching an agreement with Park Geun-hye administration on the comfort women issue late last year.

"I and the Jongno district mayor, who is also affiliated with the opposition, have said we will not cooperate with the statue being taken down, and university students continue guarding it day and night," Park said.

His remarks came in response to a question on his views during a talk on the afternoon of Oct. 25 with seven representatives of the US Comfort Women Justice Coalition (CWJC) in his office at Seoul City

Hall.

CWJC is a multiracial, multicultural civic group based in the US that supported a San Francisco City Council resolution last year for the setting up of a comfort women memorial and has been raising the funds needed to put the memorial up. It is also campaign to have information on the Japanese military comfort women and other examples of historical violence and international human rights issues taught in public schools in San Francisco and elsewhere in California.

Park said he “agree[s] that the comfort women issue is not simply a South Korean matter but a matter of international women’s rights.”

“As sister cities, San Francisco and Seoul will work together for peace and justice,” he pledged.

The CWJC delegation applauded news that the city of Seoul was supporting the registration of comfort women-related archival materials with the UNESCO Memory of the World after the South Korean government abandons plans to do so.

“The adoption rate for textbooks that overlook Japan’s crimes is just 0.1%. We shouldn’t forget that most Japanese people are on our side,” Park said.

At the end of the talk, the delegation expressed the wish to invite Park to an unveiling of the monument once it is erected in San Francisco.

“Will you come even if you’re President?” someone asked. A laughing Park replied, “I hope to take part in your campaign once my term is over.”

Park invited the delegation for the talk after meeting members during a September work trip to the US. The group is currently planning its own visits to China and Japan as well. In addition to joint chairs Lillian Sing and Julie Tang and steering committee member Phyllis Kim, the delegation also included four other members of Jewish, Chinese, and other ethnicities.

Park has long been involved in the issue of comfort women drafted as sexual slaves to the Japanese military. He was a representative prosecution lawyer for the south side in the 2000 Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal in Tokyo, helping produce a guilty verdict on human rights infringements and war crimes committed by Japan. In 1993, he delivered a talk at the University of California, Berkeley, on the “Women’s Volunteer Labor Corps from an international human rights perspective.”

By Choi Woo-ri, staff reporter

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