

**Korea's Position on Japan's Review  
of the Details Leading to the Drafting of the Kono Statement  
June 25, 2014**

*On June 20, 2014, the government of Japan disclosed to the public the result of the so-called review on details leading to the drafting of the Kono Statement of 1993, the first document in which the Japanese government acknowledged the coercive nature of its wartime sexual slavery.*

**1. General Comments**

On the issue of Japan's wartime sexual slavery, the international community has already come to a clear and definite conclusion, as can be seen in the reports of United Nations Special Rapporteurs, the resolutions adopted by legislatures in the United States and the European Union, etc. Countless number of women were forced against their will into systematic sexual slavery at an unprecedented scale with the involvement of Japan's military authorities and government in the years leading up to and during the Second World War.

Since the announcement of the Kono Statement, all subsequent governments in Japan have pledged to uphold the Statement. The Abe government that came into power in December 2012, although it campaigned on the election platform promising to revise the Kono Statement, succumbed to the strong public opinion in the international community and announced that it would also uphold the Kono Statement. Nevertheless, it has since pushed ahead to conduct a so-called review of the details leading to the drafting of the Kono Statement.

The Korean government has clearly and repeatedly warned that reviewing the Kono Statement while pledging to uphold it is in and of itself a contradictory and

meaningless act. In response, the Japanese government has alleged that the reviewing exercise will strengthen the legitimacy and the credibility of the Statement, thereby helping to resolve the wartime sexual slavery issue.

However, the disclosed results of the review clearly revealed the intention of the Abe government. While ostensibly pledging to uphold the Kono Statement, the true intention of the Abe government is to undermine the credibility of the Kono Statement and to render the Statement itself meaningless by distorting facts through arbitrarily compiling and editing its version of the discussions that took place between Korea and Japan.

Since the announcement of the findings of the review, critical voices are heard not only from the Korean and the international press but also from within Japan that the Abe government's intention behind the review is to undermine the Kono Statement.

Detailed and counterfactual descriptions of the Asian Womens' Fund, which bears no relevance to the circumstances leading to the drafting of the Kono Statement is another attestation that Japan's stated intention behind the review – to strengthen the legitimacy and the credibility of the Kono Statement – is nothing but a pretense.

Furthermore, the Abe government has unilaterally disclosed to the public details of the discussions between the diplomatic authorities of Korea and Japan that were intentionally selected and reformulated. This is an act that not only disregards the diplomatic practice and the comity of nations, but also undermines the trust between Korea and Japan, not to mention that it is a bizarre behavior which does not conform to the code of conduct in the international community.

No attempt made by the Abe government will alter the historical truth or the stern judgment of the international community. The review of the Kono Statement clearly demonstrated to the international community that the Abe government

has no intention to genuinely remorse, much less recognize the responsibility, for its past wrongdoings.

## **2. Korea's Positions on Key Findings of the Review**

### **A. The Issue of Prior Coordination**

Through the findings of the review, the Abe government is attempting to disseminate a distorted notion that the Kono Statement is a result of closely coordinated political compromise between the governments of Korea and Japan, rather than a fact-finding based on hard historical truth.

The Korean government has maintained from the very beginning a consistent position that the contents of the Kono Statement are a matter to be decided according to the fact-finding results and own judgments of the Japanese government; that the discovery of truth regarding the wartime sexual slavery cannot become a subject of negotiation or bargaining; and that conclusions should be drawn based on facts, no matter how long it might take.

The opinion rendered by the Korean government on the language of the Kono Statement at the time came only after Japan's repeated pleas for discussion, under the premise that it was made on an informal basis to help clarify the facts with accuracy. It was nothing resembling any sort of a prior coordination. Japan also made it clear that the Statement would be made on its own accord and under its responsibility.

More specifically, since around March 1993, Japan had repeatedly reaffirmed its position through relevant director-general level channels that the issue of wartime sexual slavery will be resolved at Japan's own initiative and it will take full responsibility for the contents of the Statement, while insisting that it is inconceivable not to have any discussion with Korea prior to the announcement of the Statement, and thus cooperation from the Korean government was

necessary.

## **B. Testimonies by the Victims of Sexual Slavery**

More than any other document, the vivid testimonies made by the sixteen victims are the strongest and clearest evidence of the coercive nature of the wartime sexual slavery by the Japanese Imperial Army. These statements become all the more important if it is true that in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War the Japanese government ordered all documents related to the wartime sexual slavery to be incinerated or destroyed, as can be imagined. Notwithstanding this, the findings of the review describe these testimonies as mere formalities conducted only as a demonstration of Japan's sincerity. Such a description is intended to undermine the credibility of the testimonies and deny the coercive nature of Japan's wartime sexual slavery, which is the very core of the Kono Statement.

In addition, although the sixteen victims of sexual slavery clearly testified their experiences of the indescribable pains inflicted on them against their will, the findings of the review record not a single word in relation to this. No matter how much the Japanese government may try to ignore the testimonies made by these victims, the coercive nature of the wartime sexual slavery, as brought into light through these testimonies, are historical facts that cannot be hidden away. This is authoritatively and objectively reported in the final reports of the relevant UN Special Rapporteurs.

Toward the end of July 1993, when the collection of victims' testimonies was in progress, a high-level Japanese government official even made it clear to Korea that the Kono Statement would be based on the victims' testimonies and expressed gratitude to the Korean government for its cooperation in obtaining the testimonies from the victims of sexual slavery.

## **C. The Issue of the Asian Women's Fund**

The findings of the review also describe in detail the Asian Women's Fund, which bears no relations to the preparation of the Kono Statement. Not only that, some of the contents of such findings are factually incorrect.

The findings of the review falsely imply that the reason for the failure of the Asian Women's Fund was because of the constant change of position by the Korean government. However, the victims had maintained from the beginning that they could not accept the so-called "atonement money" without measures to restore their honor including an official apology. From the inception until the termination of the Fund, the Korean government consistently conveyed this point to Japan, emphasizing that it was crucial to first seek the understanding and consent of the victims and relevant organizations. Nonetheless, Japan went ahead unilaterally offering the so-called "atonement money" with neither the understanding nor the consent of the victims, which led to the eventual failure of the Fund.

This leaves us with no choice but to assume that Japan's intention is to embellish the Fund as a gesture of good will and place all the blame for the failure of the Fund on the Korean government and the victims.

Through the Korea-Japan Director General level meetings and discussions with the Fund's representatives, the Korean government pointed out that the victims and relevant organizations were seeking measures of an official nature from the Japanese government including its apology, and repeatedly emphasized that it is essential to take measures that all the victims and relevant organizations can accept with consensus. At that time, the Japanese embassy in Seoul even expressed their regret and apology many times for the unilateral management of the Fund.

### **3. Conclusion**

It cannot be denied that the Abe government, despite their earlier explanation,

attempted to discredit the Kono Statement by conducting the review. The Korean government expresses its deepest regret and disappointment in this regard. The June 23 *New York Times* editorial pointed out that many historians outside of Japan agree on the coercive nature of Japan's wartime sexual slavery, criticized the Abe government for having done an injustice to the victims of sexual slavery as well as hurting his country, and concluded that "as a democracy and the world's third largest economy, Japan cannot be seen as trying to rewrite the past."

If the Abe government truly aimed to resolve the wartime sexual slavery issue, it should not focus so much time and energy on such a self-destructive process. Instead, the Abe government should conduct a thorough investigation on the truths concerning the wartime sexual slavery so as to improve the Kono Statement by remedying its shortcomings.

The Abe government must show its will to sincerely uphold the Kono Statement through concrete actions. Today, only 54 victims are still alive. The sincerity with which Japan makes efforts to resolve the wartime sexual slavery issue will be the true measure of Japan's real intention regarding the Kono Statement. The international community will keep a close watch.