



## Human Rights Now

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### Civil Society strongly condemns the recent Mayor Hashimoto' s remark on the "Comfort Women"

1. Toru HASHIMOTO, the mayor of Osaka and a co-leader of the Japan Restoration Association, a political party with 57 lawmakers in Parliament, remarked on May 13 that **the "comfort women" for the Japanese Army during World War II was "necessary"** in maintaining discipline in the army and providing relief for soldiers. "When soldiers are risking their lives by running through storms of bullets, and you want to give these emotionally charged mass of fighters a rest somewhere, everyone understands that you need a comfort women system," he said to reporters. He also claimed that there was no proof that the Japanese authorities had forced women into servitude.

**Human Rights Now**, a Tokyo based international human rights NGO **strongly condemn these outrageous comments** as an attempt to negate the historical facts of the Japanese Army's direct involvement in the recruitment of women and to defend egregious violations of women's human rights in the name of necessity.

2. So- called Comfort Women are those who were victimized for widespread and systematic sexual violence and torture at "comfort stations" or other facility in Asian regions by the former Japanese Military during World War II. The victims consisted of women from Korea, China, the Philippines, Indonesia Netherland and many other countries or regions. The victims were detained and forcibly subjected to continuous rape and other sexual exploitation by Japanese soldiers. Relentless violence was used, especially when women resisted, including beatings, stabbings and burnings. Coupled with the appalling conditions of detention, a large number of women lost their lives. Since the practice was completely against human dignity, survivors have been suffering grave distress both physically and psychologically for decades. As the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, and another independent UN expert correctly found, the reality of the "comfort women" system was nothing less than military "sexual slavery".<sup>1</sup>

Wartime rape, sexual slavery and forced prostitution are recognized most grave violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, as the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court explicitly stipulates "sexual slavery" and "forced prostitution" as war crimes and crimes against humanity.

It is obvious that the comfort women system constitutes grave human rights violations against international law and thus should never be justified and endorsed. Hashimoto's remark is causing further pain and distress among the survivors. We demand Mr. Hashimoto to withdraw his remark immediately and publicly apologize to the survivors.

3. More disturbingly, Hashimoto's remark to deny the forcible nature of the practice is not an isolated incident but an echo of the 2007 decision of the cabinet under the first administration of Shinzo ABE to that effect, which claimed that **"there is no evidence of forcible mobilization of the comfort women."**

The Statement by Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei KONO on the Result of the Study on the Issue of "Comfort Women" (4 August 1993) already officially admitted that "[t]he recruitment of the comfort women was conducted mainly by private recruiters who acted in response to the request of the military. The Government study has revealed that in many cases they were recruited against their own will, through coaxing coercion, etc., and that, at times, administrative/military personnel

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<sup>1</sup>Å Coomaraswamy, UN Doc. E/CN.4/1996/53/Add.1 (1996). Ms. Gay J. McDougall, Special Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission on Human Rights on systematic rape, sexual slavery and slavery-like practices during armed conflict, UN Doc. E/CN.4/Sub.2/ 1998/13 (1998).

directly took part in the recruitments.” A number of court judgments in Japan also clearly found the forcible nature of the practice of comfort women. In addition, many survivors and witnesses testified to the Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal that they were enslaved by abduction or other types force, including official conscription, arrest, intimidation by soldiers, violence.<sup>2</sup> There are no grounds whatsoever to deny the forcible nature of the comfort women practice.

Despite the gravity of human rights violations, Japan has failed to provide effective remedy, including compensation, official apology or satisfactory measures to the survivors, and the ABE administration even attempted to deny the forcible nature of the practice by maintaining and publicly stating the abovementioned 2007 cabinet decision. Such an attitude has been widely criticized by UN human rights bodies such as the Human Rights Committee, CEDAW and CAT as well as the Human Rights Council UPR working groups.

A public disclosure of the truth and a public apology, including an acknowledgment of the facts, is especially crucial for the victims of the “comfort women” system whose sufferings have been unduly neglected for decades.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, we demand that the Japan government officially condemn the remark made by Mr. Hashimoto and unequivocally reaffirm that fact that the comfort women practice was forcible in nature and constituted grave human rights violations. (End)

**This statement is open for endorsement of NGOs. If your NGO wishes to co-sign, please contact us via email.**

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<sup>2</sup> Judgment, The Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal for the Trial of Japan’s Military Sexual Slavery, Case No. PT-2000-1-T, 31 January 2002. See also “ ‘Ianhū’ 100 nin no Shōgen”, DAYS JAPAN, vol.4, No.6, June 2007 (“Testimonies of 100 ‘Comfort Women’ ”, containing names and pictures of survivors from South Korea, North Korea, China, Philippines, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Japan, the Netherlands, and East Timor on).

<sup>3</sup> See Basic Principles and Guidelines in the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law, adopted by the Commission on Human Rights in 2005, UN Doc. E/CN.4/RES/2005/35 (affirming such remedies for victims of gross violations of international human rights).