

SVAW Newsletter 09

AI Index: ACT 77/019/2005

“Comfort women”: demanding justice for the brutal humiliation suffered

Three former "comfort women" at the House of Sharing, South Korea.

© Paula Allen

In armed conflicts all over the world sexual violence against women is so widespread that this crime is perceived as an inevitable consequence of war. One of the most compelling examples is the system of institutionalized sexual slavery used by the Japanese Imperial Army from the 1930s to the end of WWII.

"I want justice before I die."

Lola Leoncia Guevarra, 97, the eldest survivor

Up to 200,000 women were sexually enslaved by the Japanese military, in what was known as “comfort stations”. Women were enslaved against their will and repeatedly raped, tortured and brutalized for months and years. Victims were Chinese, Taiwanese, Korean, Filipina, Malaysian, Dutch, East Timorese and Japanese. Most women were under the age of 20 and some girls were as young as 12.

As a consequence of their experiences, many women were severely traumatized, many never married and many were unable to have children as a result of the torture they suffered.

The issue of “comfort women” and their institutionalized rape was ignored by the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, set up to prosecute Japan’s war criminals. Justice is still being denied.

“The Japanese government thinks, it [the issue of ‘comfort women’] will be buried and forgotten. But it won't. As long as our next generation knows about it, it won't be forgotten.”

Gil Won-ok

Humiliated and ashamed, “comfort women” survivors remained silent for nearly six decades, suffering isolation, shame, mental and physical ill-health, and often extreme poverty.

Since 1992, Korean “comfort women” have been demonstrating every Wednesday in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul, South Korea.

“Whenever I speak at a gathering I cry but I feel like an activist. I spoke in the former Yugoslavia to women who themselves had been raped in the conflict, ..., they said they themselves were not ready to speak about what happened to them but that I had given them courage and hope.”

Lola Ammonita

With remarkable courage, former “comfort women” are speaking about their ordeal. Their bravery is encouraging others to speak out too.

By claiming their rights, women are mobilizing and inspiring a global movement that demands an end to crimes of sexual violence against women.

[Fifteen "comfort women" tell their story \(in English\)](#)

Voices from the frontline: read the stories of human rights defenders

Japan: Appeals for compensation fall on deaf ears

Amnesty International calls on the Japanese government to accept full responsibility for crimes committed against women condemned to sexual slavery by their Japanese captors -- so-called "comfort women" -- before and during the Second World War.

NEW ONLINE

Activist toolkit

Making rights a reality by building your own campaign and more.

Irshad Manjil truly believe that the economic empowerment of women will be the cause or the catalyst for wider reform.

"Welcome to Norway"

In Norway...

A country where 1 in 4 women is abused by men in close relationships. Watch AI Norway's video. (video player required, English only)

Stop torture and ill-treatment in the "war on terror"

Amnesty International calls for action to stop governments using torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment in the "war on terror" and to challenge attempts to defend their use.