

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Media Advisory

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## Japan: 'Comfort Women' European Speaking Tour

As part of its campaign on Stop Violence Against Women, and Justice for Survivors of Japan's Sexual Slavery System (comfort women), Amnesty International is organizing a speakers' tour in 4 European capitals – The Hague, Brussels, Berlin and London- with three former comfort women from 1 – 14 November, 2007.

Amnesty International is urging the European Parliament and the Council of Europe to raise this issue with the Japanese government.

As most of the survivors are in their 80s now, this may be the last opportunity to meet them in Europe.

List of speakers:

- **Gil Won Ok**, 79, from South Korea. She was placed in a comfort station in northeast China when she was 13. After she caught syphilis and developed tumors, a Japanese military doctor removed her uterus. Like many of the women, Gil Won Ok was unable to bear children and never married.
- **Ellen van der Ploeg**, 84, from the Netherlands. During World War II, she lived with her family in the former Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia). Between 1943 and 1946, date at which she was liberated, Ellen lived in five different internment camps. When she was working in one of the camps, she was turned over to a comfort station by the Imperial Japanese forces. Soldiers would cut her food rationing if she did not work hard enough. They also ignored orders to use condoms, which led to her contracting a venereal disease.
- **Menen Castillo**, 78, from the Philippines. She was 13 years old when Japanese soldiers kidnapped her from her home and took her to her school, which was turned into a Japanese military garrison and comfort station. She was kept there for four days during which she was repeatedly raped. When she returned home after her mother negotiated her release, Menen was extremely traumatized and sick.

The speakers will visit the following cities:

### The Hague

2 November

10:30-11:15 Press conference at the Center Nieuwspoord, The Hague – *Please contact AI Netherlands*

11:30-12:30 Manifestation in front of the Dutch Parliament and handover of Open Letter to Dutch MPs supporting a Parliamentary motion (Het Plein, The Hague)

14:30-15:15 Picketline in front of the Japanese Embassy (handover of the Open Letter)

3 November

12:00 Short wreath laying ceremony at the East Indies Monument

### Brussels

6 November

Morning Slots available for media interviews - *Please contact AI Belgium/AI EU press officers*

14:30-16:00 Testimony hearing at the European Parliament, chaired by Ms. Jean Lambert, MEP (Room: PHS 1C47; Interpretation will be provided in French, German and English) – *Please contact AI EU press office in advance to arrange for media passes to the European Parliament*

## **Berlin**

8 November

*Evening* Talk (details to be confirmed) – *Please contact AI Germany*

## **London**

12 November

*Noon* Demonstration outside Japanese Embassy

13 November

19:00 Talk at Amnesty International UK,  
The Human Rights Action Centre  
17-25 New Inn Yard  
London EC2A 3EA  
*Please contact AI UK*

**Journalists are welcome to attend the talks. Those wishing to attend the events and interview speakers, please contact:**

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### **Historical background**

The Government of Japan, during its colonial and wartime occupation of Asia and the Pacific Islands from the 1930s through the duration of World War II, officially commissioned the acquisition of young women for the sole purpose of sexual servitude to its Imperial Armed Forces, who became known to the world as ianfu or 'comfort women'. Historians conclude that as many as 200,000 women were enslaved.

The 'comfort women' system of forced military prostitution included gang rape, forced abortions, humiliation, and sexual violence resulting in mutilation, death, or eventual suicide in one of the largest cases of human trafficking in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the dozens of cases of 'comfort women' cases brought before Japanese courts, all have entailed dismissals of

plaintiffs' claims for compensation, despite court judgements acknowledging the Imperial Armed Forces' direct and indirect involvement, and the state's responsibility.

Most of the victims of the 'comfort women' system have passed away, and the remaining survivors are 80 or more years of age.

The full extent of the sexual slavery system has never been fully disclosed by the Government of Japan.

Public Document

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566  
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