

Prof. Dr. Hans-Gert Pöttering, MEP  
President of the European Parliament  
Rue Wiertz 60  
1047 Brussels, Belgium

OPEN LETTER

14 November 2007

Dear Dr. Pöttering,

I am writing this open letter to urge you and the European Parliament to take immediate action to call on the Government of Japan to provide justice for the survivors of Japan's military sexual slavery system.

Up to 200,000 women and girls from the Netherlands, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Timor Leste were forced into sexual servitude by the Japanese Imperial Army before and during World War II. They are euphemistically known as 'comfort women', and 62 years on, survivors continue to be denied justice – they are still calling and waiting for full reparations.

The system of forced military prostitution by the Government of Japan included gang rape, forced abortions, humiliation, and sexual violence resulting in mutilation, death, or eventual suicide. This is one of the largest cases of human trafficking in the 20th century.

Mrs. Ellen van der Ploeg (84 years) from the Netherlands, Mrs. Won-Ok Gil (80 years) from South Korea and Mrs. Menen Medina-Castillo (78 years) from the Philippines bore witness to the plight of all other 'comfort women' as they spoke at a public hearing session in the European Parliament on 6 November.

To date, the Japanese National Assembly (the Diet) has failed to offer these women a clear and full apology. The Government of Japan should accept its responsibility for the crimes, acknowledging that these amount to crimes under international law, acknowledging the harm suffered by the survivors, and expressing sincere remorse to survivors for the crimes.

In Japan, procedural and substantive barriers in national legislations has led to all 'comfort women' cases brought before Japanese courts to be dismissed, despite court judgements recognising Japanese Imperial Armed Forces' direct and indirect involvement. The continued denial of justice prolongs the humiliation and suffering of the 'comfort women' survivors. Amnesty International considers this an ongoing human rights violation.

Contrary to the legal position vigorously upheld by the Government of Japan, the 'comfort women' sexual slavery system violated many international laws that existed at the time. By 1932, Japan had ratified treaties prohibiting forced labour and sex trafficking, including the International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children (1921); the International Agreement for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic (1904) and the International Convention for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic of 1910. As such Amnesty International asserts that the Government of Japan has a legal obligation to provide full reparations. We call on the EU to raise this issue with the Japanese government as an essential part of its regular dialogue with Japan.

Amnesty International urges the European Parliament to publicly call on the Government of Japan and on the Japanese National Assembly (Diet) to:

Take legal measures to remove existing obstacles to obtaining full reparations before Japanese courts. In particular, the right of individuals to claim reparations against the government should be expressly recognized in national law and cases for reparation for survivors of sexual slavery, as a crime under international law, should be prioritized, taking into account the ages of the survivors.

Amnesty International also urges the European Parliament to publicly call on the Government of Japan to:

Formally acknowledge, apologize, and accept historical and legal responsibility in a clear and unequivocal manner for its Imperial Armed Forces coercion of young women into sexual slavery, known to the world as 'comfort women', during its colonial and wartime occupation of Asia and the Pacific Islands from the 1930s through the duration of World War II;

Immediately implement effective administrative mechanisms to provide full reparations to all surviving victims of 'comfort women' system and families of the deceased victims, including all forms of reparations listed in the recommendations of the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery;

Publicly refute any suggestions that the subjugation and enslavement of 'comfort women' never occurred;

Educate current and future generations about these events.

A number of MEPs in the European Parliament are currently developing a resolution on the importance the Council of the European Union raising the issue of Comfort Women at all possible meetings with the Government of Japan. Given the European Parliament's well known stance on human rights, we believe that it is in a strong position to influence Japan to provide justice for the survivors and restore the dignity of these women before they die.

Yours sincerely,

Irene Khan  
Secretary General

We, the undersigned, support the call on the Government of Japan to provide justice for the survivors of Japan's military sexual slavery system.

Dr. Silke Voß-Kyeck,  
Generalsekretariat  
AI Germany

Heinz Patzelt  
Secretary General  
AI Austria

Makoto Teranaka  
Secretary General  
AI Japan

Eduard Nazarski  
Director  
AI Netherlands

Claire Mallinson  
Director  
AI Australia

Catherine Kim  
Director  
AI Korea

Cláudia Pedra  
Director  
AI Portugal

Philippe Hensman  
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Branislav Tichy  
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AI Slovakia

Shannon Shah  
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Larry Cox  
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AI USA