

Why oppose Sympathy Money?

Kim Kyung Hee

(Korean Council for the Women Drafted
for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan General Secretary)

The year of 1995 is a meaningful year for Koreans as well as all of Asia. It should be the year of "Jubilee" to heal the wounds of all the war victims in Asia. It should be the year all of us rejoice in celebration that it is 50 years since the second World War ended. But why are we still struggling to awaken the conscience of the Japanese Government to their legal responsibilities for war victims?

It is now the right time for Asian women activists and victims together to share what we have done so far and what are we going to do at this point since we have fought for four years together.

First of all, we must explain why we are opposed to the plan for "Sympathy Money". The Japanese Prime Minister, Mr. Murayama, announced a plan to resolve the problem of Asian war victims through a so called "Peace ^{fr. and ship} Exchange Fund for Asian Women". It will be one thousand million Yen (Y1000,000,000) raised by private fund and the Japanese Government will provide five hundred million Yen for administration costs. Each victim is supposed to get one million Yen if it is carried out. However we strongly oppose this plan for "Sympathy Money". The Japanese Government should withdraw it immediately for the following reasons;

1. In order to restore friendly relationships with neighboring Asian countries the Japanese Government should pay individual reparations to war victims.

The reparations should not only be reasonable for victims according to International Law, but also be on the basis of the Japanese Government's conscience and repentance for past wrong doing. Otherwise, it is not possible for Japan to restore relationships of trust with other Asian countries. By providing only money, no matter how much it is, it will not be helping at all. It is no wonder that the Japanese Government has not gotten any support for their becoming a member of the U.N. Security Council from neighboring Asian countries. It is the revelation of the whole truth and a formal apology for the crime of military sexual slavery that will be the starting point for restoring a friendly, trusting relationship with other Asian countries. The plan for sympathy money is an insult to victims unless it includes such an apology and revelation of the whole truth.

2. The plan for "Sympathy Money" by a private fund will remit the Japanese Government of the crime of military sexual slavery.

The military sexual slavery by Japan is a "crime against humanity" and a "war

crime". These crimes are still punishable under international customary norms and domestic laws. In addition, Japan is also punishable for these crimes under many other international instruments such as the International Convention for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic (1925) and The Forced Labor Convention (1930).

The I.L.O.(International Labor Office) stipulates forced military sexual slavery as forced labor according to the Report of the Committee of Experts on the Applications of Conventions, International Labor Conference, 81st Session, 1994. Furthermore, the Japanese Government is responsible for "impunity" since they have chosen not to punish those who were involved in the crime. On November 22, 1994 the I.C.J.(International Commission of Jurists) sent their recommendation to the Japanese Government that they pay individual reparations to the victims of Japanese military sexual slavery.

Not only has the Japanese Government neglected to do this but it has not made any effort to release information materials related to the war period. This neglect to do so only further reflects the belief that the Japanese Government has something to hide. They have not conceded to any demands to release materials related to the issue which are currently closed to the public. They are trying to avoid clarifying where the responsibility lies by establishing this plan for "Sympathy Money,". If the money is raised by Japanese civilians in a fundraising program, it will be remitting the Japanese Government of their legal responsibility for war victims.

3. The survivors of military sexual slavery by Japan are women who should not be objects of sympathy or pity, rather they should be offered apologies and reparations under International Law in order to restore their human dignity and honor.

These survivors are living history of military sexual slavery by Japan. They are still struggling with what they have gone through and their deep wounds. So called "Sympathy Money" or any other measure has nothing to do with their healing if it is not the expression of a sincere apology and reparation. Besides this, nothing can restore their human dignity. When the Japanese Government tries to deal with this issue as a money matter, it steps on the survivors' human dignity again because it distracts the focus from the issue of the Military Sexual Slavery, and instead belittles the reparations to donations to poor women in poor Asian countries.

Therefore, survivors, activists and other militants have been demonstrating in front of the Japanese Embassy. The 155th demonstration will be held on March 1, 1995. Survivors are still screaming: "We don't need sympathy money." "Give it to your Japanese beggars!" "Give me back my youth!" "I don't need such money, even all the money in Japan is no compensation without an official apology."

When one victim testified her experience in Canada, a Japanese journalist stood up and said in tears that those comfort girls were drafted at the age of her own daughter.

It is true that there is a lot of raping of women by occupying soldiers. But is there any other case which was as deliberate, long term, and systematic as that which

was planned, designed, and enforced by the Supreme Commander of the Japanese army?

I strongly believe that this kind of Military Sexual Slavery should not have happened in our history. If the Japanese Government truly wants to have peaceful friendly relationships with other neighbouring Asian countries, they first have to show that they respect International Law. The Japanese Government must withdraw the plan for "Sympathy Money" immediately and must pay reparations to individual survivors with an official apology. Furthermore, they must record and teach this to younger generations. I have conviction that we will achieve the goals through our Asian sisterhood solidarity work. Let's work together!