

Why do we oppose sympathy money by a private fund ?

Yang, YoungJi
(Korean resident in Japan)

I. Introduction

The issue of military sexual slavery by Japan is a national crime of the Japanese, a crime of sexual violence in the situation of war and a violation against humanity. Working from this basic premise, it is obvious that the Japanese government should pay reparations to victims in accordance with International Law. However, in spite of supporting organizations' and victims' strong demands, the Japanese government has ignored all activities and demands which have been made so far, and proposes "sympathy money" by a private fund as a resolution. In this report, I would like to consider the Japanese government's proposal of "sympathy money" by a private fund and to clarify the reason why it can not be a solution in the perspective of a Korean resident in Japan.

II. The Background of the decision for " Sympathy Money "

On August 31, 1994, Murayama expressed that a private fund would be a means through which Japanese people could share the blame for their responsibility for actions in the war. The plan for this fund was decided at the interim report of the small committee for the issue of " comfort women " on December 7, 1994. The small committee decided that they would not compensate any individual or person. This means that there is no way for survivors to receive reparations.

At present, the Japanese government is planning to form an " Asia Peace Friendship Fund for Women " (supposedly collected through civil fund raising). The Japanese government is planning to raise the fund between April and October 1995, along with business organizations such as Mikimusego, Guroyanakydeasego and Yosinagayoure. The arrangement being that organizations give their collective money to victims through any cooperative organization at a specific place, Korean Red Cross in Korea and with headquarters at the Japanese Red Cross. The main axis of this "Asia Peace Friendship Fund for Women " which is based on O.D.A., is to protect women's human dignity and they attach only a small part of this project to giving money to victims. Furthermore, the title of "military sexual slavery " is avoided, thus acting as a great counterplan to avoid acknowledging the historical truth of military sexual slavery by Japan.

III. The factors which make possible the idea of a private fund.

(1) The Japanese government's principle of not compensating any war victim and the heavy wall of bureaucracy surrounding the Japanese government.

In the interim report, the small committee explains the reasons why there is a need for Japanese people's broad participation in raising "sympathy money". In regards to the demand of reparations for Asian Pacific war victims, including former "comfort women", the Japanese government has tried earnestly to cope with the issue through international law and in accordance with the San Francisco Peace Treaty and other related treaties. Therefore, since they believe they no longer have any legal obligations all that remains is a moral responsibility. Thus the Japanese government encourages Japanese people to participate as much as possible with this plan which relies on public conscience.

The main principle with which the Japanese government persists is that they can not compensate individual war victims. The underlying assumption of this is that if Japan does compensate individual war victims, it would most likely result in other victimized countries making demands in the near future. Understandably then, the Japanese government wants to solve this issue as quickly as possible while countries such as China remain silent.

(2.) Withdrawal attitude of the Korean government

On August 4, 1993, the Korean government announced its second report on this issue and requested that the Japanese government recognize their involvement in military sexual slavery and reflect what had previously been expressed by Prime Minister Gono as a will to apologise. Following this the Korean government would not make further demands for redress.

The Korean government may be presuming it can keep national faith by withdrawing from making further demands, but on the otherhand it means that the Korean government is unable to demand any legal responsibility of the Japanese government over this issue. For example, the Japanese Foreign Affairs Ministry distorted the words of Kim, YoungSam, President of Korea. President Kim said, "we do not need compensation, rather we demand thorough fact finding". The Japanese government distorted this statement in such a way that they claim they can not give any compensation because the Korean government does not want to receive any reparations. Therefore the Japanese government attributes the irresponsibility for individual reparations to the Korean government.

The Korean Foreign Affairs Ministry responded to an inquiry by the Korean Council about this matter as such; "Even if the Korean government does not ask for reparations at a national level, we have a deep concern and support for the demand of reparations at a civil level and support this movement". With serious differences between the Japanese government's and Korean government's opinion in regards to the terms of individual reparations, The Korean Residents in Japan Women's Network wishes to express its support for the Korean government. The real meaning of President Kim's statement was to urge the Japanese government to resolve this issue as a matter of moral conscience. Therefore, it

is not seen as necessary for the Korean government to order the Japanese government to do this and to do that.

Regardless of the fact that the Korean government has appealed to the Japanese government on a matter of upholding moral principles, the Japanese government claims it is because of the Korean government's attitude that they can not compensate individual victims.

Further to this, the Japanese government has ignored the movement which is demanding that the issue go to the Permanent Court of Arbitration, as well as demanding the punishment of responsible persons and reparations, which are all recommendations of the I.C.J (International Commission of Jurists), the United Nations and other international human rights organizations. The Japanese government has concluded that the only solution to this issue is to be sympathy money raised by a private fund.

IV. Why do we oppose " sympathy money "?

We believe that the plan for sympathy money by a private fund is a deceptive solution and is a distortion of the truth. Victims and supporting organizations fiercely disagree with it because;

(1) It makes the Japanese government's responsibility unclear.

(2) It is not any solution. The money means nothing to victims without the apology and individual reparations. The restoration of victims' honor is impossible with "sympathy money".

(3) It will become a Japanese national charitable work. It will therefore not be clear that the responsibility is of individuals as well as a nation. If we ignore this fact and accept the "sympathy money" then we will never reach our goals of fact-finding and correcting history. We remember how only recently Japanese cabinet ministers have distorted history by attempting to rationalize and justify Japan's criminal war activities. Moreover, on Jan 31, 1995, when 143 members of the National Assembly met to establish the "National Council for Protecting Japanese", they were able to express their total opposition to the anti-war movement. This method of history distortion and the admiration of war, merely encourages the discrimination of Korean people in Japan as well as former Korean "comfort woman".

Song, SinDo, who resides in Japan, said that she would not accept " sympathy money ", if she were to do so then she would only be further despised by Japanese people. By accepting sympathy money through a private fund, the restoration of Song's honor will never be possible and the reality of history will remain distorted. Therefore, it is the right of victims to receive reparations that are not part of a charity fund.