



WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL WAR CRIMES TRIBUNAL ON JAPAN'S MILITARY SEXUAL SLAVERY

March 2000

Dear Friends,

From December 7 to 10, 2000, the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery will be held in Tokyo, Japan – around the time of the commemoration of International Human Rights Day and the last month of the last year of the 20th century. This will be followed by a Public Hearing on Current War Crimes, on December 11, 2000. The Tribunal and Public Hearing are being organized by women's organizations throughout the Asia-Pacific region and the international community to highlight the continuing disregard of the rights of former Asian Comfort Women and the continuing violations of women's human rights in current wars and conflict situations.

The **Tribunal** will primarily deal with responsibilities of both individuals and states for Japanese military sexual slavery committed against women in the context of Japanese colonial domination and military occupation of various Asian countries before and during the Second World War. Many will not survive to see the dawning of the next century, nor the fruits of their bravery. But they will leave a legacy in the global women's human rights movement, that of making the world recognize that sexual slavery is a crime against humanity. The **Public Hearing** will deal with contemporary forms of sexual violence committed against women in other situations of wars and armed conflict happening in many parts of the world today. It is necessary to link the issue of Japan's military sexual slavery to contemporary forms of violence happening in countries such as in Kosovo, Rwanda, and East Timor, among others. We must learn from the lessons of the past to prevent the cycle of violence against women during wars and other conflict situations.

Non-government organizations and women's groups have long recognized the importance of vindicating the rights of the former Comfort Women. The continuing injustice they suffer emanates from the failure of the international community including Japan to recognize the gravity of the war crimes committed against them immediately following World War II and for the next 50 years. It was not until the mid-1990's that the international community began to rectify this situation by specifically referring to the crimes committed against the Comfort Women in resolutions and reports of the Commission on Human Rights and the Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. The government of Japan while acknowledging its moral responsibility for war crimes against the Comfort Women however denies its legal responsibility to offer restitution which restores the dignity of the women and provides meaningful compensation. The holding of the Tribunal will hopefully provide a mechanism for vindicating the rights of the Comfort Women.

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The organizers of the Tribunal envisage that it will achieve the following goals:

- the receipt of evidence from each country highlighting the grave nature of the crimes committed against the Comfort Women and demonstrating the responsibility of the Japanese military and government for the crimes committed against the Comfort Women;
- an exploration and analysis of the gendered nature of the crimes and the necessity for a gender sensitive approach to the issues of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide;
- a finding from eminent personalities about the nature of the crimes committed against the Comfort Women and the identification of the steps to be taken by the Japanese government;
- creation of an international movement to influence the attitude of the Japanese government; and
- to end impunity of wartime sexual violence against women and to prevent such crimes to happen again in future

The Tribunal is NGO's (people's) Tribunal which will follow a format similar to a criminal court even if it has no legal authority. There will be a panel of judges to hear and receive evidence (both oral and written) as well as legal arguments from prosecutors for each of the geographic areas represented at the hearing. The panel will be given an opportunity to consult and will deliver a judgment.

The convenors of the Tribunal are the Violence Against Women in War Network (VAWW-Net Japan) represented by Ms. Yayori Matsui, the Korean Council for Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan represented by Ms. Yun Chung-Ok, and the Asian Center for Women's Human Rights (ASCENT) represented by Ms. Indai Lourdes Sajor. They form part of the International Organizing Committee which include the International Advisory Committee composed of women and human rights activists, and the Legal Advisers. The participating countries for the Tribunal are North and South Korea, Peoples Republic of China, Taiwan, Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Netherlands who were victimized by Japan's military sexual slavery. Countries in Asia, Latin America, Africa and elsewhere experiencing wars and other conflict situations will testify in the Public Hearing on Current War Crimes. Eminent personalities in the international community will be invited to serve as Judges and Chief Prosecutors for the Tribunal.

It is our profound belief that this Tribunal can have a positive influence on the development of international law in general and the working of the new International Criminal Court. But more importantly, it will give a sense of justice to the Comfort Women of Asia, who are now in their advance age, of which justice has long been denied. This Tribunal is a tribute to the courage of these old women, whose pain and suffering in the last century during the Second World War, is unparalleled.

The Tribunal and the Public Hearing will indeed create a major impact in the global campaign for women's human rights, thus the women from Asia-Pacific and in the international community are encourage to undertake such an initiative despite limited resources. We therefore write you to solicit your support for this worthwhile endeavor. Any support that you or your organization can provide for the needs of the Tribunal, the International Organizing Committee, the needs of the victimized countries and the women survivors-victims will be highly appreciated.

You may send your inquiries, solidarity messages, and/or donations to the Asian Center for Women's Human Rights (ASCENT) in the address stated below. In behalf of the *Malaya Lolas* of the Philippines we thank you and we look forward to your being part of this important event.

Sincerely yours,

INDAI LOURDES SAJOR
Convenor, Women's War Crimes Tribunal
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