

Ex-sex slaves demand Japan PM acknowledge past

By Mari Yamaguchi
The Associated Press

TOKYO — Five former victims of Japan's wartime sex slavery and their supporters have submitted hundreds of official documents to the government, demanding Prime Minister Shinzo Abe acknowledge Japan's past atrocity and formally apologize.

Several support groups backing the women, who are from Indonesia, the Philippines, and South Korea, said the documents collected from around the world include clear evidence of coercion.

Japan apologized in 1993 over the "comfort women" system of military prostitutes before and during World War II, but it insists there is no proof the women were systematically coerced by the government, citing the lack of official Japanese documents stating so.

The cabinet in an Abe-led government in 2007 underscored the lack of proof. Abe recently promised Japan won't change its 1993 apology, but is re-examining the study that was the basis of the apology. Neighboring countries have criticized Japan over its review, particularly a re-examination of interviews with former Korean victims, as an attempt to discredit the women and the issue.

"That's a lie. We have evidence. I'm a living proof," said Estelita Dy, an 84-year-old victim from the Philippines who was kidnapped by Japanese soldiers in 1943 when she was 12 years old. "I feel outraged every time I hear people say we were not forced into this. That's why I have to keep telling my story."

She said she was happy to see the new documents and the group's demand to Abe being submitted to the government. Dozens of fellow victims in the Philippines have died, she said, calling for a quick resolution.

The support groups criticized the government for looking the other way since the 1993 apology and now trying to discredit the content of studies under previous governments more willing to atone for Japan's wartime actions. The victims and their supporters demanded Abe officially acknowledge Japan's wartime government and military established and ran the brothel system, and that the women were forced into the system against their will. They also demanded the Abe government disclose all official records related to the issue, conduct an additional investigation, and promote education.

Historians say tens of thousands of women from across Asia were forced to



OFFICIAL APOLOGY SOUGHT. Supporter Yang Chingja, second left, hands to a government official part of hundreds of pages of documents that experts say contain proof of coercion in the military-led "comfort women" sex slavery system during World War II, as former South Korean victims, Kim Bok-dong, 88, bottom left, and Lee Yong-soo, 85, center on wheelchair, and Indonesian victim Mince, 86, far back center wearing a white knit cap next to Yang, look on in front of the Cabinet Office in Tokyo. The group demanded Prime Minister Shinzo Abe face Japan's wartime atrocity and formally apologize. Historians who helped compile the 529 pieces of official records, collected from in and outside Japan, show clear evidence of coercion by the Japanese military and government in recruiting and running the system. (AP Photo/Mari Yamaguchi)

provide sex to Japanese soldiers at frontline brothels. Japanese nationalists insist the women were voluntary prostitutes, not sex slaves.

In 1995, Japan set up a private fund that provided 2 million yen (\$20,000) each to about 280 women in the Philippines, Taiwan, and South Korea, and funded nursing homes and medical assistance for Indonesian and former Dutch sex slaves. In South Korea, more than 200 women came forward and were recognized as eligible recipients, but only a fraction accepted the money due to criticism of the private fund instead of official compensation.

Yang Chingja, a leader of Japanese supporters, said Abe's government has tried to trivialize the issue as a bilateral dispute between Japan and South Korea, instead of a universal problem of sexual abuse of women.

Yoshiaki Yoshimi, a Chuo University historian and a respected expert in the topic, said the 529 documents he and other historians have compiled since 1993 contain proof the Japanese military and the government were directly involved in setting up and recruiting the girls and women from around Asia, often by deception and kidnapping.

More than one-third of the documents came from Japanese Defense Ministry archives. Dozens were obtained from foreign militaries and governments, including the U.S., China, and Taiwan, and the Netherlands — a former colonizer of Indonesia. A document recently discovered in a Justice Ministry archive showed a cover-up by a military police official using the military budget, Yoshimi said.

He said the women were clearly forcibly taken away and placed under slave-like conditions at the brothels.

George Takei sees gay pride beginning in Japan

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"African Americans, women, people with disabilities, and gay men and lesbians have reminded all Americans that we are each entitled to the same rights, liberties, responsibilities, and opportunities," Kennedy said in an opening speech. "Those struggle[s] to transform our society, here tonight we celebrate the countless acts of courage and commitment and reaffirm that LGBT rights are human rights."

Akie Abe, who this year became the first Japanese first lady to participate in

a LGBT march, said she did so because she supports the cause of creating a society that tolerates more diversity. She said she became a supporter of LGBT rights through her work against AIDS.

"There is no difference to importance of love from sexual orientation. There should not be any discrimination because [of] who you love," she said. "I am going to raise my voice. If my raised voice could contribute to the pride of LGBT people, there is no greater joy."



RECORD-BREAKING EMBRACES. Nepalese students hug trees during a mass tree hugging on World Environment Day on the outskirts of Kathmandu, Nepal, on June 5, 2014. More than 2,000 people gathered in Nepal's capital in a bid to set a world record for the largest tree hug. (AP Photo/Niranjan Shrestha)

Thousands in Nepal hug trees in world record bid

By Binaj Gurubacharya
The Associated Press

KATHMANDU, Nepal — More than 2,000 people, mostly students wearing school uniforms, gathered in Nepal's capital in a bid to set a world record for the largest tree hug.

Parliament members, office workers, and even Buddhist monks also took part in the attempt, joining the students at a park on the outskirts of Kathmandu. The participants said they were trying to set the record to celebrate World Environment Day by spreading awareness about the importance of trees.

"Our goal is to set a new world record and at the same time spread the message that trees are important for the environment and everyone," said Thanewor Guragai, who coordinated the event.

The previous Guinness World Record for most people hugging trees simultaneously was 936 people in Portland, Oregon last July.

Participants held trees for two minutes as volunteers beat drums at the National Martyrs and Peace Park, on the northeast edge of Kathmandu.

"We are gathered here in our attempt to save the forests and make people aware that trees and forests are important for human civilization," said Rajan K.C., who was among the 20 parliament members hugging the trees and monitoring the event.

One of the participating students, ninth-grader Ganga Pandit, said she had planted samplings in the past but felt it was important to join the campaign to save existing trees.

The organizers of the event are sending photos, video, a signed statement from the parliament members who were there, and the names of the participants to Guinness, which will decide whether to recognize the feat as a new record.

Guragai said it would take about two months to get a recognition certificate from Guinness.



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