

A Critique of Prime Minister Abe's Policy on the "Comfort Women" Issue and Japan's Social Formation of Hegemonic Masculinity

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Synopsis

For many years, Japan's current prime minister, Abe Shinzo, has been one of the most vocal deniers of Japan's responsibility for the so-called "comfort women system," the sex slave system operated by the Japanese Imperial Forces in many parts of the Asia-Pacific during the 15-year Asia-Pacific War between 1931 and 1945. Moreover, Abe has been associated with extreme nationalist groups such as the "Association of A Liberalist View of History" and the "Association of Young Parliamentarians for Japan's Future and Historical Education," both of which have been at the forefront of the movement denying the existence of the Japanese military sex slave system. These nationalist associations have also been the core groups attempting to sanitize many other Japanese war crimes including the Nanjing Massacre.

Initially, my paper briefly examines Prime minister Abe's long involvement in various movements, which deny the historical facts of Japan's war atrocities and emphasize a nationalistic education in Japanese school curricula. I also demonstrate how Abe often tells blatant lies about his own attitude towards the comfort women issue, opportunistically calculating the political situation each time. In doing so I explain how the so-called "comfort women bashing" promoted by Abe and his supporters is endangering Japan's democracy itself. In the second part of my paper, I analyze Japan's present social formation, which allows people like Abe and other nationalistic male politicians to openly exercise hegemonic masculinity. For this purpose, I examine Japan's current socio-economic systems that clearly discriminate against women. I focus on various social problems that confront Japanese women such as the employment system, the pension system, domestic violence and sexualized popular culture, which widely disseminate ideas of hegemonic masculinity into Japanese society, influencing everyone, including women. In conclusion, I make a proposal for setting up a law equivalent to Article 130 of the German Criminal Law (the so-called "Auschwitz

Lie Law”) as a counter measure for confronting “comfort women bashing,” which is rapidly gaining power and adversely impacting popular thinking about Japan’s war responsibility.

I am presently working on a much more extensive paper than that which can be presented at this sort of seminar, so below is a point form description of the essential issues that I will analyze. These will form part of a Power Point presentation.

Abe’s Involvement in the comfort women issue:

- (1) On January 16, 1992, at a meeting with South Korean President, Roh Tae-woo, in Seoul, Japan’s Prime Minister Miyazawa admitted that the Japanese Imperial Forces were responsible for setting up the so-called “comfort women system.” He promised that the Japanese government would investigate this matter further.
- (2) The Japanese government examined relevant Japanese official documents, including reports prepared by the Allied (in particular the US) Forces during the war, as well as the proceedings of the Dutch military war crimes tribunal conducted in Batavia in 1948 on the so-called Semarang Incident. They also conducted interviews with 16 Korean former comfort women. On August 4, 1993, as a result of the findings revealed by these official investigations, the Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono Yohei issued a statement subsequently known as the “Kono Statement.”
- (3) The statement reads in part as follows:
‘The Japanese military was, directly or indirectly, involved in the establishment and management of the comfort stations and the transfer of comfort women. The recruitment of the comfort women was conducted mainly by private recruiters who acted in response to the request of the military. The Government study has revealed that in many cases they were recruited against their own will, through coaxing coercion, etc., and that, at times, administrative/military personnel directly took part in the recruitments. They lived in misery at comfort stations under a coercive atmosphere.’
‘Undeniably, this was an act, with the involvement of the military authorities of the day, that severely injured the honor and dignity of many women. The Government of Japan would like to take this opportunity once again to extend its sincere

apologies and remorse to all those, irrespective of place of origin, who suffered immeasurable pain and incurable physical and psychological wounds as comfort women.’

- (4) The statement concluded by saying ‘We hereby reiterate our firm determination never to repeat the same mistake by forever engraving such issues in our memories *through the study and teaching of history.*’(emphasis added) In accordance with this commitment, the Japanese government encouraged school textbook publishing houses to include references to the comfort women issue. As a result, from 1997 onwards, all editions published by the seven school text book publishing houses included references to the comfort women issue as well as other issues related to Japan’s war responsibility in their junior high-school textbooks on Japanese history.
- (5) After 1996, however, certain nationalist politicians, academics, journalists and right-wing political groups began a fierce campaign against these textbook reforms, claiming that the comfort women system was not a sex-slave system but a legitimate prostitution business arrangement. They strongly demanded that references to the comfort women issue be withdrawn from school textbooks. At the same time they also claimed that Japanese war atrocities such as the Nanjing Massacre were a Chinese fabrication, and that the Japanese never committed such war crimes. In June 1996, some hardliners from the LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) formed an organization called the “Association of Parliamentarians for a Bright Japan.” Abe Shinzo, who was elected as a member of the Lower House in the Diet (Japanese National Parliament) for the first time three years before, became the deputy secretary of this organization. In February 1997, this group was reorganized under the name of the “Association of Young Parliamentarians for Japan’s Future and Historical Education.” Again Abe became the secretary of this new organization. Together with Nakagawa Shoichi, the President of this Association, Abe initiated a campaign within the Diet condemning the Japanese education as “heavily biased.”
- (6) For many years Abe has been closely collaborating with nationalist scholars such as Fujioka Nobukatsu, former Professor in Education at Tokyo University, one of the leading members of the group called the “Association for a Liberalist View of History.” On January 30, 1997, Fujioka and other members of this group formed another organization called the “Association for Producing New Textbooks

(hereafter APNT).” In April 2004 APNT successfully submitted its own version of textbooks for Japanese history and social studies to the Ministry of Education for approval. Needless to say, these textbooks make no reference to any war crimes committed by the Japanese Imperial Forces in many parts of the Asia-Pacific. Instead, they justify Japan’s military conduct and emphasize the superiority of the Japanese nation and culture. The APNT’s textbooks were initially published by Fuyo Publishing House, a subsidiary company of Fuji-Sankei Corporation, Japan’s most conservative and nationalistic media (newspaper and TV) company, and are now published by two different right-wing publishing houses. The APNT has been gradually increasing the number of schools that adopt its textbooks.

- (7) Due to continuous political pressure on textbook publishing houses by Abe, his nationalistic colleagues and politicians, as well as bureaucrats in the Ministry of Education, the number of history textbooks referring to the comfort women issue rapidly decreased within a few years. In 2000, the above people, together with the APNT, succeeded in amending the school textbook selection system, so that the power to select textbooks was taken away from schoolteachers and vested with the Education Board of each local council. By 2006 no junior high school textbooks in Japan referred to the comfort women issue any longer. All the publishers had submitted to the political pressure of Abe and his group, ‘self regulating’ so as not to include the issue of comfort women in their textbooks.
- (8) For five days between December 8 and 12, 2000, an organization called “Violence Against Women in War-Network Japan (hereafter VAW-Net Japan)” in collaboration with many other women’s organizations held “the Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan’s Military Sexual Slavery” in Tokyo. About 400 foreigners including 64 former comfort women from eight different nations participated in this people’s tribunal, and every day more than 1,000 people attended the trial. At this tribunal, Emperor Hirohito, General Tojo and seven other Japanese top military leaders were indicted, and all were found guilty. VAW-Net Japan gave NHK (Japanese Broadcasting Corporation) full support to film the entire proceeding of the tribunal to produce a documentary program on this theme as a part of the series called “How Should We Adjudicate War?” When it was aired on January 30, 2001, however, it was clear that the program had been substantially sabotaged.

- (9) On its website, VAW-Net Japan later explained how the program was sabotaged in the following manner. It said in part: ‘There was no mention of the Tribunal’s official name, or of keywords such as “the Japanese military,” and “the system of sexual slavery.” There were no scenes shot inside the hall where the Tribunal was held, the sponsoring organizations were not mentioned, nor were there any comments from the sponsors. Most importantly, *there was not one word about the verdict*, which was not only the most significant aspect of the Tribunal, but which also struck at the heart of the overall theme of the series, “How Should We Adjudicate War?” All favorable comments concerning the Tribunal were cut. There was very little testimony from survivors in the program, and that of the two Japanese veterans who served as witnesses was cut out altogether. The program opened with the moderator’s disparaging comments on the Tribunal, followed by *a rightwing scholar’s lengthy condemnation of the Tribunal and abusive statements concerning former “comfort women” (claiming that they were prostitutes, that there was no evidence to back up their testimony, etc.)*’ (emphasis added) In fact, shortly after the tribunal concluded, right-wing political groups started demanding that NHK cancel the program. A few days before the program was aired, about 30 rightwing activists stormed the NHK head office building in Tokyo, repeating the same demand.
- (10) On January 12 and again on January 18, 2005, Asahi Newspaper, one of Japan’s largest national newspapers, reported that NHK sabotaged the program because of repeated demands made by Abe and Nakagawa. It is likely that the above mentioned right-wing groups approached Abe and Nakagawa and asked them to put pressure on NHK while they themselves also campaigned hard against NHK’s planned program. Clearly, the political intervention by Abe and Nakagawa was a violation of Japan’s Constitution that protects freedom of information. Yet, the lawsuit instigated by VAW-Net Japan against NHK dealt only with the content of the program and did not deal with this political intervention, and thus Abe and Nakagawa were free from prosecution.
- (11) On September 26, 2006, Abe was elected as Prime Minister of Japan. On October 5, he stated in a Diet committee that there is no evidence to prove that comfort women were forcibly taken into comfort stations, so the issue must not be taught in junior high schools. Abe used the expression “coercion in the narrow sense” to

indicate “abduction” or “kidnap.” By defining “coercion” simply as “abduction” and “kidnap,” he ignored the fact that many women were deceived and conned into becoming “comfort women” or sold to comfort stations because of poverty. At the same time he completely ignored cases such as Jan Ruff-O’Hearn and other Dutch women who were forcibly taken from internment camps and put into comfort stations, a fact verified at the Dutch military war crimes tribunal in 1948. At the same time he stated that the so-called A-class war criminals tried at the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal were not criminals according to Japan’s domestic law. He claimed that Japan had no option but to accept the judgment of the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal because of the political situation at the time. It seems obvious that Abe adopted the concept of “coercion in the narrow sense” from the members of APNT such as Fujioka, as well as from their interpretation of the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal.

- (12) In January 2007, Mike Honda, a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, proposed a resolution to the House of Representatives, requesting that Japan ‘formally acknowledge, apologize, and accept historical 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.’
- (13) On March 16, 2007, Abe stated that he would respect the “Kono statement.” He added, however, that it was confirmed at a cabinet meeting that there is no evidence in the documents found by the Japanese government to prove that women were forcibly taken away by Japanese military forces or police.
- (14) On March 24, 2007, the Washington Post severely criticized Abe’s attitude towards the comfort women issue as “double talk.” It read in part ‘What’s odd -- and offensive – is..... to roll back Japan’s acceptance of responsibility for the abduction, rape and sexual enslavement of tens of thousands of women during World War II. Responding to a pending resolution in the U.S. Congress calling for an official apology, Mr. Abe has twice this month issued statements claiming there is no documentation proving that the Japanese military participated in abducting the women. he should straightforwardly accept responsibility for Japan’s own crimes -- and apologize to the victims he has slandered.’ The New York Times and

many other newspapers in Korea, China, Taiwan, and the Philippines also ran similar articles criticizing Abe's dishonest approach to this issue.

- (15) On March 27, 2007, Abe met U.S. President George Bush at Camp David. At the press conference after this meeting, Abe said 'Well, in my meeting with the congressional representatives yesterday, I explained my thoughts, and that is I do have deep-felt sympathy that my people had to serve as comfort women, were placed in extreme hardships, and had to suffer that sacrifice; and that I, as Prime Minister of Japan, expressed my apologies, and also expressed my apologies for the fact that they were placed in that sort of circumstance. The 20th century was a century when human rights were violated in many parts of the world. So we have to make the 21st century a century -- a wonderful century in which no human rights are violated. And I, myself, and Japan wish to make significant contributions to that end. And so I explained these thoughts to the President.' Bush replied to this by saying 'The comfort women issue is a regrettable chapter in the history of the world, and *I accept the Prime Minister's apology*. I thought it was very -- I thought his statements -- Kono's statement, as well as statements here in the United States were very straightforward and from his heart. And I'm looking forward to working with this man to lead our nations forward. And that's what we spent time discussing today. We had a personal visit on the issue. He gave his -- he told me what was on his heart about the issue, and I appreciated his candor. And our jobs are to, obviously, learn lessons from the past. All of us need to learn lessons from the past and lead our nations forward. That's what the Prime Minister is doing in a very capable way.' It is extraordinary that Japan's Prime Minister expressed apologies on the comfort women issue in the U.S., and that the U.S. President accepted his apology while both completely ignored the actual victims of the Japanese military sex enslavement.
- (16) Abe has never expressed his apologies directly to any former comfort women since this meeting with Bush at Camp David in March 2007. When the House of Representatives passed Honda's resolution on July 30, 2007, Abe simply said 'it was disappointing.'
- (17) Abe's Prime Ministership lasted less than one year, and he resigned on August 27, 2007.
- (18) On November 4, 2012 a group called "the Committee for Historical Facts"

consisting of 38 Japanese Diet members together with 14 academics and journalists published an advertisement entitled ‘Yes, we remember the facts’ in *the Star Ledger*, the major newspaper in the state of New Jersey. In this advertisement, they claimed that there is no evidence to support the claim that “comfort women” were forcibly taken into “comfort stations.” Among the list of 38 Diet members was Abe’s name, despite the fact that he had supposedly apologized to former comfort women in Washington DC five years earlier. In fact, the same advertisement under the title of “The Facts” was published in the Washington Post on June 14 2007. Yet, Abe’s name was not included in the members of “the Committee for Historical Facts.” It seems obvious that Abe, who was still prime minister at the time, hesitated to blatantly negate Japan’s responsibility for the violation of human rights of military sex slaves, although less than three months earlier he had expressed “deep sympathy” to former “comfort women” during his trip to the U.S.

(19) On December 26, 2012, Abe returned to power. In April 2013, he again began making statements to discredit not only the Kono Statement but also the Murayama statement. In August 1995, then prime minister, Murayama Tomi-ichi issued a special statement for the 50th Anniversary of the end of the Asia-Pacific War, and officially apologized for Japan’s aggression into Asian neighboring nations. This statement was endorsed at the Diet as “the Statement of the Renunciation of War.” Abe repeatedly said in the Diet that there is no clear academic or legal definition of “the war of aggression” and therefore Japan’s war against China was not a war of aggression.

(20) At a press conference on May 13, 2013, Hashimoto Toru, Mayor of Osaka, virtually repeated the same claim that Abe was making to discredit the Kono Statement. Moreover, Hashimoto stated “For soldiers who risked their lives in circumstances where bullets are flying around like rain and wind, if you want them to get some rest, a comfort woman system was necessary. That’s clear to anyone.” He also said “The US troops based in Japan today should patronize the local sex industry more, to help reduce rapes and other assaults.” Hashimoto was severely condemned by Koreans as well as many Americans including the mayor and Board of Supervisors of San Francisco, a sister city of Osaka.

(21) In fact, Hashimoto’s statement created a huge scandal throughout the world. In addition, the US government also criticized Abe’s negative comments on the Kono

and Murayama Statements. It is almost certain that this swinging political mood concerning the comfort women issue changed Abe's public stance again, motivating him to claim that his position is different to Hashimoto's, and that he feels sincerely sorry for former comfort women.

- (22) On May 17, 2013, The UN Committee of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights issued "Concluding Observations on the Third Periodic Report of Japan" adopted by the Committee at its fiftieth session. In this report the Committee recommended that 'the State party take all necessary measures to address the lasting effects of the exploitation and to guarantee the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights by "comfort women". The Committee also recommended that the State party educate the public on the exploitation of 'comfort women' so as to prevent hate speech and other manifestations that stigmatize them.'
- (23) On May 31, 2013 the UN Committee Against Torture issued a special recommendation to the Japanese government specifically on the issue of comfort women. The Committee condemned the Japanese government for repeatedly ignoring recommendations made by many other UN human rights mechanisms including the Human Rights Committee, and requested the immediate implementation of the following five administrative measures. The Japanese Government should:
- (a) Publicly acknowledge legal responsibility for the crimes of sexual slavery, and prosecute and punish perpetrators with appropriate penalties;
 - (b) Refute attempts to deny the facts by the government authorities and public figures and to re-traumatize the victims through such repeated denials;
 - (c) Disclose related materials, and investigate the facts thoroughly;
 - (d) Recognize the victim's right to redress, and accordingly provide them full and effective redress and reparation, including compensation, satisfaction and the means for as full rehabilitation as possible;
 - (e) Educate the general public about the issue and include the events in all history textbooks, as a means of preventing further violations of the State party's obligations under the Convention.
- (24) Abe and his cabinet members decided to ignore both recommendations, claiming that Japan has no obligation to adopt them because those recommendations have no

legal binding force.

Growing “Comfort Women Bashing” Promoted by Abe and His Supporters

- (25) In July 2013 the LDP led by Abe won a landslide victory in the election of the Upper House of the Diet, resulting in complete control of both the Lower and Upper Houses by the LDP. This led Abe to believe that he now had absolute power to adopt any policies that he wanted to introduce. Again he began working hard to discredit the Kono and Murayama Statements and visited Yasukuni Shrine, ignoring the US government advice not to do so. In addition, he introduced the Protection of National Secrecy Law, and began trying to change Japan’s Constitution to fully remilitarize the nation.
- (26) In October 2013, Abe appointed many of his own friends, who share the same nationalistic ideas, to influential official positions. For example, Eto Seichi, a LDP parliamentarian who has supported Abe’s nationalistic campaign for many years, was appointed Advisor to Prime Minister; Professor Yagi Hideji, former president of APNT became a member of the Education Rebuilding Council; Momii Katsuto, former Deputy President of Mitsui Trading Company, took on the Chairmanship of NHK; and Hyakuta Naoki and Hasegawa Michiko, both ultra nationalists, were appointed board members of NHK. At his first press conference after taking up his position as head of NHK, Momii defended the nation’s use of wartime “comfort women” and dismissed press freedom concerns about the new state secrets law. Hyakuta publicly stated that the Nanking Massacre was a fabrication designed to cancel out U.S. atrocities such as the fire bombing of Tokyo and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Hasegawa still believes that Japan’s emperor is a divine being, and referred to feminism as “pathogenic germs.”
- (27) Partly because of strong public criticism of the statements made by Momiii and other people, who were appointed by Abe to senior positions within governmental organizations, and partly because of rapidly growing right-wing support, Abe and his close associates such as the Chief Cabinet Secretary, Suga Yoshihide, probably thought that it was now time that they should completely discredit the Kono Statement and begin to work to replace it with an “Abe Statement.” For some time they have been preparing the “Abe Statement” to be issued in August 2015 to

commemorate the 70th anniversary of the end of the Asia-Pacific War. This would justify Japan's military conduct in the Asia Pacific War and sanitize Japanese atrocities committed in various parts of the Asia Pacific during that period.

- (28) To this end, the Abe government made an announcement in February 2014 that it would review the Kono Statement, by examining testimonies given by former Korean comfort women, which were used in the drafting of the Kono Statement issued in August 1993. At the same time, however, in an attempt to avoid further criticism, particularly from the U.S. government, it was announced that the Abe cabinet would continue to hold the Kono Statement as the Japanese government's official statement. This was a clear contradiction: on the one hand Abe and his colleagues claimed they would maintain the Kono Statement as national policy, yet on the other hand, they were virtually trying to defame it.
- (29) As expected, the review of the Kono Statement, which was published in June 2014, states that testimonies given by former Korean comfort women and used to draft the statement were not substantiated by other evidence, leading to the claim that they do not really verify the fact that women were forced to become sex slaves. Overall the report attempts to give the strong impression that, due to political pressure from the Korean government at the time, the Japanese government accepted those testimonies as evidence of sex slavery despite their doubtfulness. In other words, it slanders former comfort women as liars. In this way, it is clear that the report was written to support the stance of the Abe cabinet on this issue by deliberately ignoring many other relevant documents that were utilized to draw up the Kono Statement. The review report is in fact a complete fabrication and a grave insult to the victims of Japan's military sex slavery.
- (30) Moreover, the report also praises the Asian Women's Fund program, which was initiated under the Murayama cabinet in 1995, and operated for ten years between 1997 and 2007. The aim of this fund program was to compensate former comfort women with 2 million yen per person. Yet, because the Japanese government was reluctant to acknowledge full responsibility for military sex slavery, the government provided only the administrative costs of running the program, and the actual compensation fund was raised through donations from the private sector, in particular former public workers' unions and private corporations. Because of the halfhearted nature of the fund program, many former comfort women were

reluctant to receive compensation, demanding that the Japanese government acknowledge full responsibility and provide the entire compensation sum. The result was that the program failed, particularly in Korea. Yet, the review report claims that despite the program's general success, it was not very successful in Korea, due to sabotage by NGOs supporting former comfort women and the uncooperative attitude of the Korean government. In this way, the report again criticizes Koreans and fails to objectively self-analyze Japanese government conduct in this matter.

- (31) By defaming the Kono Statement in this way, the Abe cabinet invited further criticism of Abe's policy from international organizations such as the UN Human Rights Committee. In July 2014, this committee issued Concluding Observations on Japan's human rights issues, in which the way the Japanese government deals with former comfort women was severely condemned. It states in part 'The Committee is also concerned about re-victimization of the former comfort women by attacks on their reputations, including some by public officials and some that are encouraged by the State party's equivocal position.' It is really regrettable that Abe and his supporters do not realize how badly they are damaging Japan's reputation by conducting a "comfort women bashing" campaign in this way.
- (32) On August 5 and 6, 2014, Asahi Newspaper, one of the most popular newspapers and the one that is regarded as the most progressive in Japan, unexpectedly ran a series of articles on the comfort women issue. In this, Asahi admitted that, among the numerous articles on the comfort women issue it has published so far, 16 articles published between September 1982 and March 1997 were mistakenly based on false testimonies made by a man called Yoshida Seiji. In 1983 Yoshida published a book entitled *My War Crimes*, in which he claimed that he was responsible for abducting 205 Korean women from Jeju Island in May 1943 to make them comfort women. He received much media attention at the time and gave public talks at various places in Japan and Korea in the late 1980s and early '90s. It was not only Asahi, but also other major Japanese newspapers such as Sankei, Yomiuri and Mainichi that published similar articles based on Yoshida's testimony. By early 1992, however, some historians and journalists began to notice discrepancies in his talks and cast doubt on his testimony. Consequently, by the late 1990s, all the media stopped using Yoshida's testimony as a source of credible

information, having noticed that Yoshida was making false testimonies to seek media attention and make money as a result.

- (33) Asahi Newspaper's sudden public admission of its mistake 17 years after ceasing to use Yoshida's testimony is very strange. It is even more curious that Sankei, Yomiuri and Mainichi Newspapers, as well as a few popular weekly magazines, severely condemned Asahi Newspaper for fabricating stories of the abductions of Korean women to make them sex slaves. They did so, pretending that they themselves had never used Yoshida's testimony in their own reportage on the comfort women issue. Several right wing politicians took advantage of this affair, saying that Asahi Newspaper's fabrication disproved testimonies by former comfort women who claimed that they had been coerced into becoming sex slaves against their will, and consequently the Kono Statement should be discarded. Abe also criticized Asahi Newspaper, stating that, due to Asahi's serious error, false information on comfort women had been circulated worldwide and now many people worldwide have a completely wrong understanding of comfort women. It is also strange that there were very few reports that Yoshida's testimony was never used as a source of information for producing the Kono Statement. It can only be surmised that this whole affair criticizing Asahi Newspaper was an attempt to gain political control and to manipulate the Japanese media, the final aim being to discredit the Kono Statement yet again.
- (34) During this politically motivated campaign against Asahi Newspaper, some right wing organizations began intimidating retired Asahi Newspaper journalists who had written articles based on Yoshida's false testimony, using telephone calls and emails. One of these retired journalists, Uemura Takashi, has been hired as a part time lecturer at Hokusei Gakuen University, a private University in Sapporo city, for the past several years. Hokusei Gakuen University also received many phone calls and emails, demanding Uemura's immediate firing. There were also intimidating black mails, with threats to bomb the university and attack students. Despite strong demand from many concerned citizens not to be intimidated by such terror threats, the University decided not to hire Uemura any longer from the following academic year.
- (35) In addition to "comfort women bashing," racial harassment, in particular the so-called hate speech and demonstrations, against Korean residents in Japan by

extremists has been increasing for the several years now. Despite repeated warnings on this issue by the UN Human Rights Committee, the Japanese government has not taken any serious counter measures, stating that “freedom of speech” is guaranteed by Japan’s constitution and law. Clearly, the “comfort women bashing” movement promoted by Japan’s Prime Minister and supported by his fellow politicians and right wing nationalists is now seriously endangering Japan’s democracy.

Japanese Social Formation based on Hegemonic Masculinity

- (36) According to an opinion survey conducted by a local TV channel in Osaka three weeks after the above-mentioned controversial statement by Hashimoto in May 2013, 4,929 of 6392 (i.e., more than 70 %) people said that they did not have any problem with Hashimoto’s statement. Although it is not clear how many women were among the 4,929, it is astonishing that the majority of people did not regard Hashimoto’s sexist and misogynic statement as offensive and disgraceful. Indeed, it is quite surprising that not only men in general but also the majority of women in Japan do not think that the comfort women bashing phenomenon vigorously promoted by Japan’s prime minister and his colleagues is reprehensibly sexist and misogynic.
- (37) It is vital to examine Japan’s social formation in order to comprehend why such discriminatory ideas and socio-political systems against women are still maintained despite the modern and advanced outlook of Japanese society.
- (38) According to the Global Gender Gap Index 2013, Japan ranks 105th out of 136 nations surveyed by the World Economic Forum. The Index is “the gap between men and women in four fundamental categories: Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival and Political Empowerment.” Japan’s ratio of female legislators, senior officers and managers ranks 106th out of 136. Its ratio of women in parliament is 120th out of 136. Currently, the number of female parliamentarians in the Lower House of the Diet is only 39 out of 480, or about 8%. Such statistics make it unsurprising that comfort women bashing is rife in the male dominated Diet.
- (39) Although Japan introduced the Equal Employment Opportunity Law 25 years ago,

women's wages are currently 70% of men's wages for the same work. The number of female workers certainly increased after the introduction of this law, although two thirds of women workers are so-called "non-regular employees," many of whom are in fact part-time workers. The annual income of 40% of Japanese female workers is below two million yen (about US\$20,000). One third of unmarried Japanese female workers in their teens and twenties, i.e., 1.1 million young female workers, are so-called "under-class workers," with an annual income of below 1.14 million yen (US\$11,400), which is less than half the Japanese average income. Shockingly, 57% of Japanese single mothers with a child or children under 19 years old are in this "under-class" category.

(40) After Japan's "bubble economy" burst in the late 1990s, many companies started hiring "non-regular employees" in order to curtail labor costs. Now 40% of all Japanese workers, in effect more than 20 million people, are so-called "non-regular employees," without fully protected workers' rights. 70% of these 20 million workers are women. Female workers, particularly young, unmarried women or single mothers, cannot survive unless they have two or three non-regular or part-time jobs. Yet, Abe's government is planning to further deregulate the labor market so that Japanese companies will be able to exploit the labor of "non-regular employees" more easily.

(41) Many young single mothers are victims of domestic violence, popularly known as "DV" in Japanese. Due to the stress caused by prolonged, deep economic depression, the number of DV cases has been rapidly increasing in Japan for a number of years now. According to statistical data produced by the Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, the Center for Supporting Victims dealt with 68,000 DV cases throughout the country in 2008. This figure increased to more than 89,500 in 2012. The number of children suffering from severe psychological problems due to violence committed by their fathers against their mothers is also on the increase. In 2013, a total of 8,059 such cases were reported to police throughout Japan. This figure of reported cases seems to be the tip of iceberg. Many DV victims struggle to survive due to the lack of a financial support system for such women. Increasingly, therefore, these women become sex workers to support themselves and their dependents. According to a recent report on a NHK TV news program, some so-called "escort agencies" offer child-care facilities to sex workers with small

children.

- (42) As mentioned above, the Equal Employment Opportunity Law was introduced in Japan in 1986. Yet, by implementing this law, most Japanese companies demanded that female workers fit the male paradigm and comply with the same demands made of male workers. It ignored the needs of women with families, thereby preventing them from continuing to contribute in a positive manner. Essentially, in fact, it did not change the patriarchal Japanese system, but instead reinforced it.
- (43) Although the Japanese traditional employment system has gone through tremendous changes in the last few decades, the majority of people still generally hold the traditional belief that men should support women, and that women should devote themselves to domestic work. It is often said that gender ideology amongst the younger generation in Japan has been rapidly changing in recent years, yet in reality, it seems that the popular idea of gender roles still remains as it has always been. According to a survey recently conducted by OECD and published on March 8 this year, shortly before International Women's Day, on average Japanese women spend five hours a week doing unpaid (domestic) work, while their male counterparts spend an average of only one hour two minutes. This is the worst record among the OECD member nations. Norway is the best, where women spend three and a half hours and men spend three hours a week on unpaid work.
- (44) This traditional gender ideology continues to be reinforced in popular culture as well. For example, feature films with themes of Kamikaze pilots or other types of suicidal attacks are extremely popular, and almost every year a few such films are produced and screened throughout the country. The format of such films is typically that of a young hero being forced to die on a suicidal mission, knowing full well that Japan will lose the war anyway. He overcomes his fear of death, rationalizing his act of self-annihilation as an act of love for his mother or girlfriend. The deaths of such young men are thus romanticized and at the same time exploited to enhance nationalism. The underlying message to both male and female viewers subconsciously cultivates the idea of hegemonic masculinity - that men are actively engaged in dominating others and women should passively accept such behavior as natural. Women appear not to realize that they are in fact accepting discrimination unquestioningly.
- (45) It is astonishing that several popular weekly magazines widely read mainly by

business men and other male workers include large, full page, erotic pictures of nude women every week. *Shukan Gendai* (*Weekly Today*) and *Shukan Posuto* (*Weekly Post*) are the two most typical examples. The former is the second most popular weekly magazine in Japan, with a weekly circulation of 580,000 copies. *Shukan Posuto* has the fourth largest circulation of 467,000 copies per week. In addition, many Japanese men read weekly manga (comic) magazines, some of which regularly feature violent sexual scenes. Of course, pornographic magazines are published in many countries, but the volume of popular weekly magazines in Japan – equivalent to *Time* or *Newsweek* in the English-speaking world – yet publishing erotic female images in each issue, seems extreme. Moreover, the fact that Japanese people including women do not think it offensive is astonishing. It seems that, to some extent, even women accept Japan's hegemonic, masculine social situation as normal. It should also be noted that it was *Shukan Gendai* and *Shukan Posuto*, in addition to *Shukan Bunshun*, which regularly run highly racist, anti-Korean articles. These publications, together with other major newspapers, were responsible for the above-mentioned press campaign against Asahi Newspaper, which claimed that comfort women were not sex slaves but prostitutes.

Conclusion

- (46) In conclusion, it can be said that it is not possible to make crucial changes to the existing political situation concerning the comfort women issue simply by criticizing the policies and attitude of Abe and other nationalist politicians who maintain an ideology of hegemonic masculinity. In order to really address this issue, it is essential to break down the foundation of contemporary Japanese social formation, which persistently sustains and reinforces the socio-economic structure and ideology based on hegemonic masculinity. To achieve this goal, all Japanese people, both men and women, need to be educated in new gender ideology, based on the universal philosophy of the real equality of individuals, regardless of sexual identity.
- (47) As an initial step towards this goal, I propose to promote civil movements, which demand the introduction of the quota system into Japanese politics. This kind of social reform is essential in order to properly reflect women's voices in politics and

to make our society gender-equal. More than 100 nations worldwide have already adopted the quota system in their election systems. Norway is probably the most advanced nation in this sense, as it is stipulated by law that at least 40 % of parliamentarians must be women. In Germany, both the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party voluntarily introduced the quota system for the selection of their candidates, thereby increasing the number of women politicians. Initially we also need to demand that all Japanese political parties adopt a voluntary quota system for selection of candidates. If this were successful, it would naturally lead to the introduction of the quota system in local and national parliaments. Undoubtedly this would bring a significant change to Japan's socio-economic structure and ideology based on hegemonic masculinity.

- (48) Finally I propose that we promote a civil movement demanding new legislation, equivalent to Article 130 of the German Criminal Law (the so-called “Auschwitz Lie Law”.) This would criminalize public statements and publications that deny historical facts of Japanese war crimes, including military sex slavery and the Nanjing Massacre, committed in various parts of the Asia-Pacific for 15 years between 1931 and 1945. We need to include the criminalization of “hate speech” in the same way that Article 130 of the German Criminal Law includes the criminalization of “Racial hatred offences.” In fact, similar laws have already been adopted by France, Spain, Portugal, Slovakia, Romania, Albania and Israel. In these countries, it is a criminal act to deny not only the Jewish holocaust, but also the Armenian holocaust, as well as any judicial decisions made by the International Criminal Court.
- (49) This proposal would be extremely difficult in the current political climate in Japan. I propose to request nations in the Asia Pacific, in particular Korea, China, the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and many Pacific island nations that became victims of Japanese war atrocities during the war, to introduce a “Japanese War Crimes Lie Law” in their own nations. I also propose to request these nations to clearly state their “territorial jurisdiction” in conjunction with this law, so that any Japanese citizen, including a former prime minister, who violates this law, can be arrested if he or she visits a nation that has adopted this law. (Unfortunately, in accordance with the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961, a person who presently holds an official governmental position cannot be

arrested or tried in a foreign country.)

- (50) The real aim of such an international movement is not simply to criminalize the activities of falsifying history but to educate people to respect the personal dignity and human rights of war victims. Japanese people, in particular younger generations, who have not been properly educated about Japan's war responsibility and have little opportunity to access the relevant knowledge, should be given an incentive from outside Japan to think about such important issues.