Resolution on Justice for the 'Comfort Women'

2007/2682(RSP) - 13/12/2007 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

Following the debate held in plenary, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on Justice for the 'Comfort Women' (sex slaves in Asia before and during World War II). The resolution was adopted by 54 votes in favour, none against and 3 abstentions.Welcoming the excellent relationship between the EU and Japan, Parliament expressed its solidarity with the women who were victims of the "comfort women" system for the duration of World War II. It recalled that the government of Japan, during its colonial and wartime occupation of Asia and the Pacific Islands from the 1930s until the end of World War II, officially ordered the acquisition of young women, who became known to the world as ianfu or "comfort women", for the sole purpose of sexual servitude to its Imperial Armed Forces. The "comfort women" system included gang rape, forced abortions, humiliation, and sexual violence resulting in mutilation, death or eventual suicide, in one of the largest cases of human trafficking in the 20th century.

Parliament welcomed the statements by Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono in 1993 and by the then Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama in 1995 on the "comfort women", as well as the resolutions of the Japanese parliament (the Diet) of 1995 and 2005 expressing apologies for wartime victims, including victims of the "comfort women" system. It also welcomed the Japanese Government's initiative to establish, in 1995, the now-dissolved Asian Women's Fund, a largely government-funded private foundation, which distributed some "atonement money" to several hundred "comfort women". However, Parliament considered that this humanitarian initiative could not satisfy the victims’ claims of legal recognition and reparation under public international law, as stated by the UN Special Rapporteur Gay McDougall in her report of 1998.

Parliament pointed out that the dozens of "comfort women" cases brought before Japanese courts had all ended in the dismissal of plaintiffs’ claims for compensation, despite court judgments acknowledging the Imperial Armed Forces" direct and indirect involvement, and the State's responsibility.

It called on the Japanese Government :

- formally to acknowledge, apologise, and accept historical and legal 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 until the end of World War II ;

- to implement effective administrative mechanisms to provide reparations to all surviving victims of the "comfort women" system and the families of its deceased victims ;

- to refute publicly any claims that the subjugation and enslavement of "comfort women" never occurred.

The Japanese parliament (the Diet) was asked to take legal measures to remove existing obstacles to obtaining reparations before Japanese courts. In particular, the right of individuals to claim reparations from the government should be expressly recognised in national law, and cases for reparations for the survivors of sexual slavery, as a crime under international law, should be prioritised, taking into account the age of the survivors.

Lastly, Parliament encouraged the Japanese people and government to take further steps to recognise the full history of their nation, as is the moral duty of all countries, and to foster awareness in Japan of its actions in the 1930s and 1940s, including in relation to "comfort women". The government of Japan must educate current and future generations about those events.