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Former Comfort Woman, House of Sharing and NAKASEC
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House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and
the Global Environment

My name is Koon Ja Kim. I was born in Pyongchang, Gangwon province in 1926.

I became an orphan when I was 14 and I was placed in the home of Choi Chul Ji, a colonial police officer. As his “foster child,” I cooked and cleaned for Mr. Choi. I had a boyfriend and we wanted to be married. However, his family objected because I was an orphan.

I remember the day that changed my life forever. I was wearing a black skirt, a green shirt, and black shoes. It was March of 1942, and I was 16 years old. I had been sent out of the house by police officer Choi and told that I needed to go and make some money. I found a Korean man wearing a military uniform and he told me that he would send me on an errand and I would be paid for this errand. I followed him and he told me to board a train – a freight car. I did not know where I was going but I saw seven other young girls and another man in a military uniform on this freight train. There were other soldiers in different cars on the train, but I didn’t see them until we came to a stop and I got off the train. A Japanese soldier with a ranking badge was waiting for us by a truck. The soldiers got on the truck and the other girls and I were put on the back of the truck.

Eventually the truck stopped in front of a house that looked like an old inn. I was later told that the name of the town was Hunchun, China. The next evening, a Japanese officer came to the house. He spoke Japanese, which I did not understand. I did not know what he was saying or what he wanted until he raped me. When I refused and fought back, he punched me in the face and the blow split my eardrum. That was the first of many days and nights that I was raped. On a daily basis, I was raped by Japanese soldiers, and it was common to be raped by 20 different soldiers a day, and on some days, it was as high as 40. If we fought or resisted the rapes, we would be punished, beaten or stabbed by the soldiers. There were soldier overseers to make sure that we complied and, if we resisted, they would punish us. My body is forever marked and scarred with those beatings and in some cases stabbings with a knife. Many soldiers refused to wear condoms. We would be beaten for insisting that they wear condoms. It was common for girls to become pregnant and to contract sexually transmitted diseases. But if a girl became pregnant, she was forced to have an abortion. I was one of those girls. Eventually, we were moved to the front lines of the war to a town called Kokashi (Japanese name for a town in China). I did not believe it could get worse, but it was. The soldiers on the front lines believed they were going to die and so they acted out their fears and stress on us by being more violent than one can imagine.

After three years of this nightmare, the war ended and, I thought, so would my nightmare. After years of imprisonment and threats against our lives, we were simply told to leave. We had no money and no idea where we were or how we would get home again. Six other girls and I walked to the border of China and Korea. It took us several weeks by foot to arrive at Baekdu mountain, which is in the border of China and North Korea. We survived by eating roots and

vegetation from the ground. We had to cross the Duman River near the border to survive. We clasped hands and held on to each other as we crossed the river. One of the girls drowned and we could not save her.

I eventually made it back to my hometown but I did not have anyplace to go. I had no family or friends and I would never go back to Mr. Choi's house. To survive, I worked in a hostess bar. There, I met my old boyfriend again. We wanted to be together again, but his family again objected because I was an orphan. After mounting pressure and difficulty with his family, he committed suicide. After his death, I found out I was pregnant with his child. His family and other people in the town blamed me for my boyfriend's suicide, so I left to go to Seoul. I first worked at a hostess bar and then found a job as a housekeeper. My baby girl was born but only lived for five months. All the money that I made as a housekeeper, I spent seeking religious healing. I really wanted to know why fate had been so cruel to me. I sought healing and answers from Buddhist temples, world churches, and other religions. I am a Catholic now. Government social services eventually introduced me to the House of Sharing (a home for former comfort women), where I now reside.

My body has so many physical scars and reminders of those three violent years of my life as a young girl. There are memories that I will never be able to erase. In addition to these physical and emotional scars, the Japanese government continues to torture and punish me every day that it continues to deny the truth of those camps and what it did to me and other young girls. The war has ended but for 62 years, I have had to live a life with a scar in my heart. Not only does the Japanese government deny these barbaric actions, it claims that we voluntarily submitted to its repeated rapes and torture. The Japanese government continues to treat us as if we are not human. I believe that the officers in the Japanese government are fathers and mothers - would they act the same way if their daughters were in my situation? We were dragged there when we were young and our youth was robbed. As young girls, our innocence and youth were beaten and taken from us and our voices and cries for help were muffled and smothered with the stench of Japanese soldiers. Now, as elderly women, although we may be physically frail, we have the strength of spirit to give voice to those young girls.

The Japanese government must acknowledge and admit to its crimes and claim responsibility for these atrocities. The Japanese government is mistaken if it is simply waiting for all of us to die. Eighteen former comfort women died last year. Many have died but our memories and history live on in the voices of the younger generation and written resolutions, such as this one introduced by Congressman Honda. The Japanese government should officially apologize and provide reparations. Reparations symbolize the Japanese government's acknowledgment and responsibility for these atrocities. I am 81 years old. Money will not change my life, heal my scars, or make my memories change. I have received money in the past from the Korean government, but I donated my one hundred million won (approximately \$100,000 US) to different charities and foundations, particularly ones that work with orphans and orphanages. I was not able to study or receive an education as a young girl because I was an orphan. If I had been able to receive an education, perhaps I wouldn't have been in the situation I was in as a young girl. I don't want the money that will come from reparations. I want the responsibility of the Japanese government that the reparations symbolize. Governments must know that there is a price to pay for human rights violations and war crimes. Governments must know that our

bodies and our innocence have real value and worth. Governments must know that we will not forget. There are nine of us living in a "House of Sharing" with me. We are all in our eighties. Time continues to slip away for us, but not for our cause. We sincerely recognize the U.S. Congress for caring about the cause we have waged and the unbearable pain we have all carried. My wish is that the resolution passes as soon as possible. And that it will send a strong message to the Japanese government to acknowledge its crimes and provide official redress, including an apology and reparations.

<http://www.internationalrelations.house.gov/110/kim021507.htm>