

**Statement of
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**Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment
Committee on Foreign Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives**

**Hearing on
Protecting the Human Rights of Comfort Women
Thursday, February 15, 2007**

Chairman Faleomavaega and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for this opportunity to come before you today. I am pleased to join with Ms. Jan Ruff O'Herne of the Friends of Comfort Women in Australia and Ms. Koon Ja Kim of the National Korean American Service and Education Consortium to share our stories.

I would also like to thank Representative Michael Honda for introducing House Resolution 121, which expresses 'the sense of the House of Representatives that the Government of Japan should formally acknowledge, apologize, and accept historical responsibility in a clear and unequivocal manner for its Imperial Armed Force's 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.' You have just heard Congressman Honda explain the circumstances that compelled him to sponsor this legislation. Now we would like to add our personal histories to the conversation.

This is a story that I told nobody until just a few years ago, because the shame of my shattered childhood haunted me through the rest of my life. Some of the details of my life story you will find shocking. You will think these are the details of a movie script or novel about cruelty. I can assure you that these are the true things that happened to me.

My Early Life

I was born in 1928 in the Korean city of Taegu. My family was poor and nine of us lived in a single, small house: my parents, my grandmother, my five brothers, and myself. I only had one year of formal education and spent most of my childhood caring for my younger brothers and doing household chores so my father and mother could work outside our home to support the family.

At the age of 13, I also began working in a factory and tried to return to school, but the heavy burden of work prevented me from focusing on my studies. To tell the truth, I was not a highly motivated student, although I did enjoy music lessons and was told I had a pretty singing voice.

During World War II, when I was 15, I was drafted to the training group for the Voluntary Corps in Ch'ulsong Elementary School. Boys and girls lined up separately for training, and we

did exercises and marched in neat lines. We also had to march home at the end of each day. Our lives were highly regimented.

In the autumn of 1944, when I was 16 years old, my friend, Kim Punsun, and I were collecting shellfish at the riverside when we noticed an elderly man and a Japanese man looking down at us from the hillside. The older man pointed at us with his finger, and the Japanese man started to walk towards us. The older man disappeared, and the Japanese beckoned to us to follow him. I was scared and ran away, not caring about what happened to my friend. A few days later, Punsun knocked on my window early in the morning, and whispered to me to follow her quietly. I tiptoed out of the house after her. I left without telling my mother. I was wearing a dark skirt, a long cotton blouse buttoned up at the front and slippers on my feet. I followed my friend until we met the same man who had tried to approach us on the riverbank. He looked as if he was in his late thirties and he wore a sort of People's Army uniform with a combat cap. Altogether, there were five girls with him, including myself.

We went to the station and took a train to Kyongju. It was the first time I had been on a train. In Kyongju we were put up in a guest-house. We stayed in the guest-house for two days, during which time two more girls joined us. Now there were seven of us. We boarded a train and passed through Taegu where I could just see my home through the broken window. I suddenly missed my mother. I began to weep, saying I wanted to go home. I pushed the bundle of clothes away and continued to cry, asking the man to let me get off. He refused. Exhausted, I finally fell asleep as the train just kept on going. We must have traveled for several days.

Beating and Torture

We got off the train at Anju, in P'yongan province, and were led to what looked like an ordinary residential house. An elderly woman was keeping the house on her own. Food was short, and we were given boiled potatoes and corn. We felt very hungry and sometimes during our stay there we would pinch apples from the tree. The Japanese man who had led us from Taegu punished all of us if any single girl did something wrong. We had to stand on small round clubs, holding large bottles filled with water in our hands. Or he would beat our palms and the soles of our feet with sticks. He would ask one of us to bring him water to drink, and if the girl was slightly slow in doing what was asked, he would beat all of us. Any excuse prompted a beating. We became so scared that we tried not to upset him in any way.

In the winter, we froze, feeling ice form all over our bodies. If we complained of the cold, he would beat us. We shivered and tried to keep our frozen hands warm, doing everything behind his back. The two girls who had joined us in Kyongju were taken away, leaving the five of us who had set off together at the beginning of our journey. We remained in Anju for about a month and then boarded a train once more to travel to Dalian. We stayed overnight in a guest-house in Dalian. The following morning we were given soup and steamed bread. We boarded a ship and were told that a convoy of eleven boats would be sailing together. They were big ships. We were taken into the last one. It was already crowded with Japanese sailors. We were the only women.

New Year's Day 1945 was spent on board. The ships stopped in Shanghai, and some of the sailors landed for a short break on shore. We were not allowed to disembark. I was summoned on deck and sang for the men. Afterwards, an officer gave me two rice cakes. I shared them with

the other girls. The ships started to sail again but often halted because of bombing. One day our ship received a direct hit. The other ships were destroyed, but only the front of our ship was damaged. Men shouted and screamed outside our cabin. The ship was tossed about, and I suffered with severe seasickness. My head was splitting with pain, and my stomach seemed to turn upside down. I remember crawling towards the bathroom, throwing up as I went along, when I was grabbed by a man and dragged into a cabin. I tried to shake him off, biting his arm. I did my best to get away. But he slapped me and threw me into the cabin with such force that I couldn't fight him off. In this way I was raped. It was my first sexual experience. I was so frightened that what actually happened didn't sink in at the time. I vaguely thought that this man had forced me into the room just to do this.

People kept shouting that we would all die since the ship had been torn to pieces. We were told to put life-jackets on and to stay calm. We thought we were going to drown. Dying seemed better than going on like this. But the ship somehow managed to keep going. Later I found out that I was not the only one who had been raped. Punsun and the others had also suffered that same fate. From then on, we were often raped on the ship. I wept constantly, until my eyes became swollen. I was frightened about everything. I think that I was too young to hold a grudge against my aggressors, though looking back I feel angry and full of the desire for revenge. At that time I was so scared I didn't even dare look any man squarely in the face. One day I opened the window of our cabin and tried to jump into the water. It would have been better to end my life then and there, I thought. But the water, blue-green and white with waves, scared me so much that I lost the courage to throw myself out.

Eventually we arrived in Taiwan. When we disembarked I couldn't walk properly as my abdomen hurt so much. My glands had swollen up in my groin, and blood had coagulated around my vagina. I could walk only with great difficulty, since I was so swollen that I couldn't keep my two legs straight.

The man who had accompanied us from Taegu turned out to be the proprietor of the comfort station we were taken to. We called him Oyaji. I was the youngest amongst us. Punsun was a year older than me and the others were 18, 19 and 20. The proprietor told me to go into a certain room, but I refused. He dragged me by my hair to another room. There I was tortured with electric shocks. He was very cruel. He pulled out the telephone cord and tied my wrists and ankles with it. Then, shouting '*konoyaro!*' he twirled the telephone receiver. Lights flashed before my eyes, and my body shook all over. I couldn't stand it and begged him to stop. I said I would do anything he asked. But he turned the receiver once more. I blacked out. When I came round my body was wet; I think that he had probably poured water on me.

Life in the Comfort Station

The comfort station was a two-storey Japanese-style building with 20 rooms. There were already many women there when we arrived. About ten, all of whom looked much older than us, wore kimonos. There was a Japanese woman, the proprietor's wife. We changed into dresses given to us by the other women. The proprietor told us to call them '*nesang*', 'big sister' and to do whatever they told us to. We began to take turns to wash their clothes and cook for them. The food was a gain not enough. We ate gruel made with millet or rice. I was terrified of being beaten; I was always scared. I was never beaten by soldiers, but I was frequently beaten by the proprietor. I was so

frightened that I couldn't harbor any thoughts of running away. After having crossed an ocean and not knowing where I was, how could I think of escape?

The rooms were very small. Each was big enough for two people to lie down in. At the entrance of each hung a blanket in place of a door. The walls and floor were laid with wooden boards, and there was nothing else. We were each given a military blanket and had to sleep on the bare planks. One day, a man came in and asked my name. I was still frightened and just sat in a corner shaking my head without answering. So he said he would give me a name, and began to call me Tosiko. After that day I was always called Tosiko in the station.

We mainly had to serve a commando unit. They were not in the slightest way sympathetic towards us. They wore uniforms, but I had no idea whether they were from the army, navy or air force. I served four or five men a day. They finished their business quickly and left. Hardly any stayed overnight. I had to use old clothes, washed thoroughly, during my period. Even then I had to serve men. I was never paid for these services.

There were frequent air raids, and on some days we had to be evacuated several times. Whenever there was a raid, we were forced to hide ourselves in mountain undergrowth or in a cave. If the bombing ceased, the men would set up make-shift tents anywhere, on dry fields or in paddies, and they would make us serve them. Even if the tents were blown down by the wind, the men didn't pay any attention but finished what they were doing to us. Those men were worse than dogs or pigs. They never wore condoms. I don't remember ever having a medical examination.

One day, while we were in an underground shelter, the comfort station collapsed in a bombing attack. Our shelter was buried under the rubble. We dug through the soil, trying to get out. After a while we saw light through a small hole. I was incredibly relieved to be able to look out and shouted 'At last I can see outside!' Then I smelt smoke, and blood gushed out of my nose and mouth. I lost consciousness. The proprietor's wife and mistress both died. As the house had collapsed, we were moved into a bomb shelter at the foot of a hill, and there we again had to serve the men. After a while, the proprietor got hold of some material and built a rough and ready house. It didn't take him long. We continued to serve the men. In the end I was infected with venereal disease and the proprietor gave me the injection of the serum known as No. 606, which was used before penicillin became widely available. The fluid had a reddish tint. The disease stayed with me for a long time because I had to continue to serve men before I was clear. So I had to have constant injections. There was no hospital or clinic in the vicinity. Medical care – such as it was – was haphazard.

Apart from going to the bomb shelters we weren't allowed out at all. We were warned that if we tried to venture beyond the confines of the station we would be killed, and I was sufficiently scared not to try anything. The men we served in the unit were all young; they seemed to be 19 or 20 years old, not much older than we girls were.

One evening, a soldier came to me and said he would be in combat later that same evening and that this battle would mark the end of his early life. I asked him what his commando unit was. He explained that one or two men would fly an airplane to attack an enemy ship or base. They would be suicide pilots. He gave me his photo and the toiletries he had been using. He had com

e to me twice before and said he had got venereal disease from me. He said he would take the disease to his grave as my present to him. Then he taught me a song:

*I take off with courage, leaving Sinzhu behind,
Over the golden and silver clouds.
There is no one to see me off:
Only Tosiko grieves for me.*

Until then I had known we were somewhere in Taiwan, but because we were kept in such close confinement and isolation, I had no idea of exactly where. From his song I learned we were in Sinzhu.

When we were evacuated to avoid the bombing we stole sugar cane. We were that hungry. But if we were caught we were beaten. We were not allowed to speak in Korean. Again, if we were caught doing so, we were beaten.

The War Ends

One day, one of the older girls who normally hardly spoke a word to us announced that she, too, was Korean. She told me, in Korean, that the war was over. We hugged each other and wept with joy. She held my hand tightly and told me I must return to Korea. We could hear people shouting and running about. This confirmed to us that the war was really over. By the time we had calmed down, the proprietor and the other women who had been at the station before us were nowhere to be found. We walked to a refugee camp by the pier. It looked like a warehouse. We were given balls of boiled rice which had dead insects mixed in. We waited for a ship. I was scared even then that someone might drag me away, so I sat, shaking with fear, in a corner wrapped in a blanket. I kept crying so much that my small eyes got even smaller.

We finally got a ship. When it arrived in Pusan, the barley was green. As we disembarked, someone sprayed us with DDT and gave us each 300 won. There were four of us: Punsun, two other girls, and myself. We said farewell and went our separate ways. I got a train to Taegu. I kept weeping and tried to hide myself from other passengers in fear that someone might take me away again. I found my house, just as run down and poor as before. My mother asked if I was a ghost or a real person and fainted.

After my return, I couldn't dare think about getting married. How could I dream of marriage? Until recently I had suffered from venereal disease. My parents and brothers did not know what I had been through; I could not tell them. My father was upset merely because his only daughter wouldn't get married. Both my parents resented the fact that they weren't able to see me hitched before they died. I worked in a drinking house which also sold fishballs, and I ran a small shop on the beach in Ulsan. For some time I ran a small market stall selling string. Then I worked as a saleswoman for an insurance company. I gave up when I began to get too old.

Return My Youth to Me!

In 1992, encouraged by the existence of the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan, I told my story. It poured out from me and I felt so relieved, but I was also faced with the question, How many more years can I live?

I am grateful that the Korean Council is trying to help us. These days I hum a song, Katusa, putting my own words to the tune: 'I am so miserable; return my youth to me; apologize You dragged us off against our own will. You trod on us. Apologize... This lament, can you hear it, my mother and father? My own people will avenge my sorrows.'

I visited my parents' graves the other day. I said to them: 'Mother, I know you won't come back to life however much I may wish for it. My own people will avenge me. Please close your eyes and go to paradise.'

Mr. Chairman, members of the subcommittee, thank you again for this opportunity to appear before you and tell my story. I am happy to answer any questions you might have.

<http://www.internationalrelations.house.gov/110/lee021507.htm>