



Canada Association for Learning & Preserving the History of WW II in Asia (ALPHA)

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Open letter To Mr. Ban Ki-moon, General Secretary of UN & and Ms. Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO

It is in the spirit of concern for international justice and global peace that we are writing you today. We were shocked to learn that the Japanese city of Minami-kyushu has submitted a cache of letters left by Second World War kamikaze pilots to UNESCO's Memory of the World Register. These letters reflect how Japanese society was mobilized for a war of aggression against its Asian neighbors and their allies in the name of the Emperor. The letters are thus an insult to not only those who suffered during the Asia-Pacific War but to all those who have fallen victim to violations of human rights during times of conflict. With respect for the victims, consideration of the interests of the Memory of the World program, and the future of global justice in mind, we strongly oppose the inclusion of the letters in the Register.

As the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War approaches, the Mayor of Minami-kyushu purports that the kamikaze letters, held by a museum located on the spot that used to serve as an airfield for kamikaze squadrons, will help people reflect on peace. However, as an organization that promotes education and awareness of the crimes against humanity committed by the Imperial Japanese Army during the Second World War, we know that underlying that stated aim is an ultra-nationalistic agenda to glorify and legitimize the needless deaths of the kamikaze pilots and the driving spirit of Japanese militarism, all under the guise of promoting peace.

Since the end of the Second World War in 1945, Japanese government officials have played down or outright denied atrocities such as the Nanking Massacre, the "Comfort Women" - a military sexual slavery system, the development and use of biochemical warfare and related human experimentation programs, and a host of other war crimes. These war crimes and crimes against humanity have often been whitewashed or outright denied in Japan's history textbooks, ensuring that only a nationalistic version of the Asia-Pacific War is taught to Japanese youth. Those within Japan who attempt to uncover the truth are harassed and threatened by both ultra-nationalists and authorities.

In addition, Japanese Prime Ministers and other high-level government officials continue to regularly visit the Yasukuni Shrine to pay homage to the country's war dead, which includes 14 convicted Class-A war criminals. They participated in these symbolic visits knowing full well that neighboring countries most deeply affected by Japan's wartime aggressions, including China and the Koreas, have condemned such visits as being akin to German leaders visiting memorials related to Nazis or Hitler. Most recently, U.S. officials have also urged Japanese Prime Minister Abe to refrain from visiting the Yasukuni Shrine and to squarely acknowledge Japan's wartime aggressions.

Yet in spite of international pressure and mounting proof of gross, systematic violations of human rights during the war by the Imperial Japanese Army, sincere steps towards truth, justice

and reconciliation by the Japanese government have not been made. Instead, the mayor of Minami-kyushu is attempting to honor kamikaze pilots for what is framed as “patriotic efforts for peace” while victims and survivors of its wartime atrocities are still denied the justice they deserve. Not only is this a horrific assault on all those who suffered under the Imperial Japanese Army but is also an insult to the spirit of the UN and Memory of the World Register. For the letters of kamikaze pilots to be included alongside Holocaust testimonies such as the Diaries of Anne Frank is totally unimaginable.

We beseech you to recognize that UNESCO’s acceptance of the kamikaze pilots’ letters to the Register would be perceived as condoning Japanese ultra-nationalists’ glorification of the suicidal attacks made in the name of the Emperor of Imperial Japan. It would also undermine efforts by the Memory of the World program to uphold the UN’s mandate of siding with peace, justice, truth and reconciliation.

For all of the reasons put forth herein, we urge you to reject the submission of the kamikaze letters to the Memory of the World Register.

Yours in truth and solidarity,

(signed)
Joseph Wong & Thekla Lit
Co-Chairs of Canada ALPHA