



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

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### **Statement issued by Canada ALPHA in response to Japan's Recent Review of the Kono Statement**

On Friday, June 20, 2014, the Japanese government presented to its parliament the results of a review by a panel of government-selected “experts” on the study that formed the basis of the 1993 Kono Statement. The Kono Statement, issued by then Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono, was the first and only official acknowledgement on the part of the Japanese government of the Imperial Japanese Army’s role in the establishment and management of “comfort stations,” and in the use of coercion to recruit women and girls. The study that preceded the statement involved interviews with 16 former Korean “comfort women” and a review of hundreds of documents.

The panel’s report on the background of the Kono Statement stated that the South Korean government was involved in backroom discussions with Japan on the statement’s wording, and that South Korea pressured Japan into stipulating that coercion was involved in the recruitment of the victims. The panel further reported that investigations of Japanese and U.S. documents, as well as interviews with former military officers and brothel operators, did not corroborate the coercion claimed by former “comfort women.” The report even called into question the validity of the 16 testimonies collected for the study, saying that Japan did not have time to finish the interviews nor to verify the truth of the testimonies.

This recent review, rather than a sincere step towards solving the issue of military sexual slavery during the Asia-Pacific War, is yet another attempt on the part of the Japanese government to evade responsibility for its wartime crimes with smoke and mirrors. By implying that the statement was a diplomatic agreement, the Japanese government intends to discredit historical evidence and to undermine its one instance of historical acknowledgement. And in suggesting the need for verification of the survivors’ testimonies, it disgraces the hundreds of women who have courageously come forward about their horrific experiences as Japanese sex slaves.

Whether or not the South Korean government was involved in the framing of the Kono Statement has no impact on the Japanese military government’s responsibility for the sexual enslavement of between 200,000 and 400,000 women and girls across Asia between 1932 and 1945. The testimonies of hundreds of survivors and witnesses, in addition to extensive documentation, have already led the international community to the unequivocal conclusion that the military sexual slavery system did in fact exist and that the victims were coerced by the Japanese military. No further verification of this is required, and attempts to do so on the part of the Japanese government are nothing more than efforts to evade responsibility by distracting attention away from the facts.

We call on the Japanese government to honor the spirit of the Kono Statement in its acknowledgement of responsibility for the military sexual slavery system and to work with

sincerity towards a solution that is acceptable to the survivors. As long as Japan continues to deny historical truth and evades responsibility for crimes against humanity committed during the Asia-Pacific War, it will continue to isolate itself from the international community to the detriment of the Japanese people. Only through reconciliation of its wartimes past can Japan step out of the shadows and into a brighter, more peaceful future as a respected and trusted member of the global village.