

**PRIMER ON FILIPINO  
“COMFORT WOMEN”:  
Questions and Answers**

**BY THE TASK FORCE ON FILIPINA VICTIMS OF  
MILITARY SEXUAL SLAVERY BY JAPAN SECRETARIAT**

**Asian Women's Human Rights Council  
(AWHRC) - Philippines  
and BAYAN - Women's Desk**

**THE TASK FORCE ON FILIPINA VICTIMS OF  
MILITARY SEXUAL SLAVERY BY JAPAN  
(TF - FILIPINO COMFORT WOMEN)**

**AWHRC-Philippines, Bagong Alyansang Makabaya - Women's  
Desk**

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Commission on Violence Against Women, GABRIELA Commission  
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**Question #1: What does the term “comfort women” mean?**

“Comfort women” is the term euphemistically used by the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II for women who provide sexual services to Japanese soldiers in comfort houses or stations which are actually brothels set-up by the Army in Japanese-occupied areas in Asia. Other terms used are the Korean word, “jungshindae” and the Japanese term, “jugun ianfu” literally meaning “military comfort women”.

These women were made to provide sex to Japanese soldiers who wait in line outside the small rooms for 30 to 40 times on weekdays and 60 to 100 times on weekends.

**Question #2: Who were the “comfort women”?**

There is an estimated 100,000 - 200,000 Asian women who were conscripted as comfort women by Japan from 1942 - 1945. Researchers believe that 80% of this number were women from present-day North and South Korea who were then annexed and colonized by Japan in 1910.

Initial reports revealed that “comfort women” came from Korea, Philippines, China, Taiwan, Japan, Borneo, Thailand and Indonesia. A Japanese government study admitted the Imperial Army’s direct involvement in the conscription of the women and said that the thousands of “comfort women” came from Korea (north and south), China, the Philippines, Taiwan (Formosa) and Indonesia (East Indies) as well as Japan.

The women, actually girls, are aged from 12 to 17 and they were assigned Japanese first names only, while some are identified only by a number.

**Question #3: What rights were violated regarding the comfort women issue?**

For 50 years, the Japanese government had been denying its involvement in the conscription and procurement of the Asian "comfort women" saying that the comfort houses were privately run by business individuals and groups. Documents and testimonies show otherwise.

The Japanese government also deny that the women were forced to become "comfort women". Testimonies from women survivors as well as from witnesses belie this denial. In 1991, Kim Hak Sun publicly came out to tell her story of abuse, degradation and exploitation by Japanese soldiers as a former "comfort woman". More came out to tell similar stories. A former Japanese soldier recounts how he and his fellow soldiers kidnapped, dragged and brought women to comfort houses for the Japanese soldiers' sexual pleasure. Taiwanese women, according to the report submitted by the Taipei Women Rescue Foundation, were either tricked, coerced and sold to become sex slaves. A large number of Chinese women were sent to Northeast China as prostitutes by the Imperial Army.

Thus, it is established that the Asian "comfort women" were forcibly and even violently recruited. In the "Asian Conference for Solidarity for the Asian Women Drafted for Sexual Services by Japan", held last August 10-11, 1992 in Korea, the women from six Asian countries believed that the army comfort women were forced, raped, tortured, gang-raped and massacred by Japanese militarism and considered to the comfort women as a form of sexual slavery, a brutal crime to women unprecedented in the history of humankind. "It illustrates how women were systematically abused and degraded - sexually, physically and psychologically by militarism and war".

The use of comfort women is a form of gender violence and a violation of the most basic rights of Asian women - the right to control one's own body, the right to life, to liberty, to freedom of movement, to dignity. Furthermore, the forced and violent conscription of women is also considered as a form of subjugation of Asian cultures - a rape of Asian nations.

***Question #4: On the Filipino Comfort Women: Are Filipinas Among the Comfort Women? Where can they be located? What documents provide reference to Filipino Comfort Women?***

On March 10, 1992, the Philippine Daily Inquirer reported that among the thousands of World War II "comfort women" were 19 Filipinas from Iloilo. A document dated March 1942 was provided to BAYAN-Women's Desk showing a medical report by a Japanese Army doctor on 19 Filipinas, including partial names of 13 of the women. The document also showed a sketch where the comfort house was located near the plaza in Iloilo City.

BAYAN made a call to the Philippine government, then under President Aquino, for an investigation. The Presidential Commission on Human Rights requested a professor at the University of the Philippines, Ricardo Jose, to make an inquiry report on forced prostitution during Japanese occupation. On June 26, the professor submitted a report to the PCHR saying that there were no major forced prostitution in the Philippines and alluding that there were no Filipino comfort women. He based his research, he said, on documents obtained from the Philippine guerilla forces or local survivors.

Last July, however, the Japanese government released its official study admitting its involvement in the massive conscription of Asian women and identified Filipinas as among the victims of their wartime sexual slavery.

In an effort to search for comfort women survivors, a preliminary investigation in Iloilo was conducted by GABRIELA-Iloilo in coordination with BAYAN-Women's Desk, AWHRC-Philippines and GABRIELA-National in July 1992. The investigation located a kempei-tai (Japanese military police) during the Japanese occupation in the Philippines who has acquired a Filipino name. He confirmed the comfort house in Iloilo which was near a certain Paris Hotel at dela Rama St., Iloilo. A former G-2 (intelligence) also confirmed the presence of comfort houses in dela Rama Street. Both men talked of comfort women they knew but are not sure if they are still alive. Testimonies from old women were also gathered in the communities of Rizal, Incore Proper and Incore New Site. They talked of truckloads of women being brought to the Paris Hotel (exclusively for Japanese soldiers) and of how the following day, a number of women would be found dead. Among the women also mentioned as comfort women were Taiwanese and Korean women.

Reports from Japan were also gathered by Lyn Resurreccion of the Philippine News and Features and also a member of AWHRC-Philippines and the TF-Filipino Comfort Women. The Japanese government study showed that Filipino comfort women worked in the following places: Ormoc, Iloilo, Masbate, Cebu, Sta. Cruz (Laguna) and Cagaayan (Mindanao). Three other places were also pointed out by a Japanese newspaper where comfort stations were established: Manila, Tacloban and Iloilo.

A newspaper article also said that in an August 1943 report from Tacloban, Leyte, nine Filipino comfort women were recorded by the

Japanese Imperial Army. Another document dated November 1945 showed the operation code "red light district" in Manila. The comfort houses were said to be administered by the Japanese Imperial Army servicement and used only by military officials and servicemen and only by the military general after 9 PM. The comfort women were required to have a weekly medical check-up.

***Question #5: What actions or movements have been started on the comfort women issue?***

It was through the recent efforts of Korean women, joined in by women from Japan, that world public attention has been focused on this gross violation of women's human rights. The Korean Council for Women Drafted for Sexual Services by Japan was created and continue to uncover facts and to locate women survivors. Cases have already been filed in Japanese courts. Mobilizations of large numbers were also organized in from of the Japanese Embassy in Korea and during the visit of Japanese Prime Minister Miyazawa in Korea.

The South Korean government filed a diplomatic protest and demanded a public apology and compensation from Japan for the victims and survivors. The North Korean government has also declared its support to the demand for compensation and apology of its comfort women victims still living in the North territory.

The Korean Council also organized and convened the "Asian Conference for Solidarity to Asian Women Drafted for Sexual Services by Japan" which was held in Seoul last August 10-11 and participated in by 60-70 Asian women coming from Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Philippines, Hong Kong and Thailand. As Asian network was formed to undertake actions on the issue

such as investigations, putting pressure on Japan to accede to the network's demands and requesting cooperation of international human rights bodies including the United Nations.

In Taiwan, the Taiwan Women's Rescue Foundation established a hotline to help those Taiwanese women who had been forced to be comfort women. Research was conducted in Taiwan, Korea and Japan. Thirteen cases have been verified. The Taiwan government has also demanded public apology and compensation from Japan.

Filipino women's groups began responding to the issue in March 1992 when the first report on Filipino comfort women came out. BAYAN-Women's Desk, in close collaboration with Asian Women Human Rights Council - Philippines and supported by other women's groups initiated a campaign to highlight the issue, look for more information, locate the survivors and demand justice for the women. On July 13, 1992, a Task Force for Filipina Victims of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan or TF - Filipino Comfort Women was formed under the AWHRC-Philippines network to coordinate the research/investigation, legal, public information and education and lobby efforts of the various women's groups in the Philippines on the comfort women issue.

Investigations, radio hopping/telephone hotlines establishment, and community action organizing are now being initiated by the members of the TF - Filipino Comfort Women since August 1992 to gather more information, locate and reach out to the women survivors and witnesses and organize local actions on the issue. A forum on Asian women's human rights which focused on the issue of Filipino Comfort Women was held last September 8. On September 18, a meeting with Philippine legislators and a press conference is being held to propose a resolution to the Senate and House of Representatives for government action and investigation on



Filipino comfort women. Then on September 25, a mobilization of men and women will be held in Mendiola near Malacañang to call on the Ramos government to take concrete steps to positively respond to the issue and demand justice for the Filipino comfort women, specifically demand for formal apology and compensation from the Japanese government.

***Question #6: What are the demands or calls of the Task Force on Filipina Victims of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan on the Filipino comfort women issue?***

The demands of the Task Force on Filipina Victims of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan on the Filipino comfort women issue are the following:

- A. For Japan government to take proper actions regarding the comfort women issue:
  - 1. A formal apology from Japan to the Filipino people and specifically to the women victims and survivors and their families;
  - 2. Adequate compensation for the women victims and their families from the Japanese government;
  - 3. For both the Japanese and the Philippine governments to include as reference in texts and history books the reality of women's human rights violation in the form of sexual slavery through "comfort women" as a war crime of Japan in order that wars and militarism, and consequently, abuses against the people, especially women and children may not repeat itself;

4. For the Japanese government to admit that they used force and violence in the conscription and treatment of "comfort women" as sex slaves, contrary to the Japanese government report that they were not forced.
- B. For the Philippine government to act on the issue of Filipino "comfort women":
1. By undertaking an official investigation and search for surviving "comfort women" or their families;
  2. By demanding for compensation and formal apology from the Japanese government for the victims, survivors and their families.
- C. To formally support the Korean Women's demand to the UN Commission on Human Rights to conduct a thorough investigation and to censure Japan for its human rights violations and cover-up of information.
- D. To repeal the Peacekeeping Operations Law or PKO Law of Japan which opens up once more the possibility of dispatch of Japanese troops to Asian countries and the rest of the world, threatening the peaceful co-existence and equality of countries, raises the specter of violence against women and children through the resurgence of Japanese militarism.
- E. To forge a strong solidarity network for all Asian women drafted for military sexual service by Japan.

At the current stage, the most important task that we face is to pressure the Philippine government to declare a firm and strong position to condemn the war crime, conduct an official investigation, search for

For more suggestions, comments, questions, and if you have any information which will help put light in the issue of Filipino comfort women, please contact us at 45-A Mapagkumbaba Street, Sikatuna Village, Quezon City or through the comfort women telephone hotlines at 999-437, 921-5571, 795-137 and 521-12-79.