

# **The Government of the Republic of Korea's Response to the Questionnaire on Transitional Justice Measures to Address the Legacy of Serious Violations of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law Committed in Colonial Contexts**

The response of the Government of the Republic of Korea will be centered around the issue of the “comfort women” – which pertains to violations of universal human rights committed by the Imperial Japanese Army in occupied territories during the Second World War. The women and girls were coerced or misled away from homes in Asian countries colonized by Japan, including Korea, and forced into military brothels called “comfort stations.”

## ***Response to Question 2: Efforts for Seeking and Establishing the Truth***

It is the civil society of the Republic of Korea that has played a leading role in promoting international awareness of the issue of “comfort women” victims as a matter of universal human rights, particularly women’s rights. They have also exerted efforts to bolster awareness on the importance of restoring the dignity of the victims and preventing the reoccurrence of such grave human rights violations.

On August 14, 1991, Kim Hak-sun, one of the late “comfort women” victims, gave the first public testimony of her painful experience. Her story resonated with the international community, raising awareness of wartime sexual violence.

In February 1992, the “comfort women” issue was first raised during the UN Human Rights Commission through the efforts of civil society. Their efforts have contributed to raising international awareness of the issue and promoting the universal significance of women’s right in conflict.

The issue has since been addressed by diverse international organizations and experts, including the UN Commission on Human Rights, Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, International Labour Organization, and multiple UN special procedures and human rights treaty bodies.

Non-governmental civil society groups in the Republic of Korea have continuously expanded their voluntary activities concerning the “comfort women” issue, from protecting and supporting the victims to organizing academic projects regarding memorialization such as gathering testimonies and historical records.

With the support of Korean civil society, the Act on Livelihood Stability and Memorial Services, Etc. for the “Comfort Women” Victims by the Imperial Japanese Army was enacted in 1993. It was later amended in 2002 to stipulate the purpose and the list of commemorative projects.

In line with civil society’s efforts, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family of the Republic of Korea published a comprehensive report on the “comfort women” issue in 2017 out of efforts to investigate and establish the truth. The systemically organized report states various historical facts regarding the issue, from damage inflicted on the victims to the efforts of the Government of the Republic of Korea and civil society to resolve the issue. The Government of the Republic of Korea has also created a database of collected data, providing broad access to researchers and the public through a website named Archive814 ([www.archive814.or.kr](http://www.archive814.or.kr)).

#### ***Response to Question 4: Efforts for Memorialization***

In accordance with the aforementioned Act on Livelihood Stability and Memorial Services, Etc., the Government of the Republic of Korea has implemented a series of commemorative projects to restore the dignity and honor of the “comfort women” victims and raise awareness of the issue as a matter of universal human rights.

In 2018, the Government of the Republic of Korea unveiled the first national monument to memorialize the victims, in the National Cemetery for Overseas Koreans. This venue serves as a public space to collectively remember and commemorate the victims. Furthermore, the government officially designated August 14 as a national memorial day for “comfort women” victims to raise international and domestic awareness of the issue and commemorate the victims, in recognition of Kim Hak-sun’s courageous first-ever public testimony as a survivor on August 14 1991. The Government of the Republic of Korea has also developed and distributed teaching materials on the “comfort women” issue

targeting primary and secondary students to educate future generations about the significance of human rights and peace.

In planning and implementing such commemorative projects, the Government of the Republic of Korea seeks to collect and reflect the opinions of related organizations during the planning stage of memorial events and projects. These efforts include holding meetings with experts and civil society organizations, consulting the “comfort women” victims, and organizing review committee meetings for projects. The government also encourages public participation, inviting the youth to these memorial events and projects. A series of voluntary engagement of the youth has given impetus to other commemorative projects in the private sector.

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