Former comfort women fight on

Continuing demonstration and visiting the Museum of Women and War | BY MARTHA VICKERY

The 1073rd demonstration of the former comfort women took place on Wednesday, May 6, and the 1100th on Wednesday, November 13. The event has been held weekly since 1992 every Wednesday in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul. Many Minnesotan Korean Americans have supported this demonstration over the years, and because Korean Quarterly staff visited Seoul twice in 2013, there are photos from two different dates.

In January, students from St. Catherine’s University, St. Paul where one of the student groups represented at the 1108th demonstration of students from St. Catherine’s University enrolled in the January term Global Search for Justice. The student group, which also visited Jeju Island to demonstrate with the activists opposing the naval base there, was led by Professor Minah Cho.

The former military sexual slaves of the Japanese Imperial Army and their supporters in this long-running human rights movement, have been demonstrating weekly since that time, putting their demonstration in the record books as the longest-running weekly demonstration in the world.

Despite various civil efforts by Japanese society towards peace and reconciliation and various personal apologies for their nation’s brutal enslavement of Korean women, no official apology has been issued by the Japanese government.

Jenny Cheong, who works on outreach for the the Korean Council for the Women Drafted into Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (the Korean Council), which has advocated for these survivors since 1991, reported that there are 283 women registered as former comfort women, and 59 are still living. One new woman asked to be put on the register in the last year, and two who were on the official list died, she said.

The Korean Council has maintained support for the cause of the former comfort women by education and engaging the participation of peace and justice groups from many countries. At the

1073rd demonstration, a Japanese group joined the event, as well as a student peace group consisting of members from several different Korean universities. A representative from each organization speaks, and this particular week, one of the former comfort women also spoke, her voice strong and assertive and passionate. Some of the onlookers were crying or trying not to cry.

The demands of the former comfort women have not wavered over the years. They want an official apology and reparations from the Japanese government, punishment for those responsible, and for the Japanese people to learn about their issue by building a memorial in Japan, and by having their story printed in the history books.

The Korean Council also provides a communal home for the former comfort women, social services, educational and outreach services, and access to research materials.

The Korean Council also maintains the Museum of Women and War, located in Mapo-gu. The museum was open in 2012 and includes the history of the former comfort women, commemoration of their rights campaign, an interpretive exhibit about the story of the former sexual slaves, commemorative art exhibits, a research library, and museum store. The museum is located near Hongik Station in Seoul. More information can be found at <www.womenandwar.net>.

Somber artwork in the walls of the Museum of Women in War. Photo by Stephen Wunrow

Entrance to the Museum of Women and War, Mapo-gu in Seoul with a sign “Together, cry out for peace!” Photo by Stephen Wunrow