

How to end a war

Final judgment brings closure to survivors, responsibility to international community



For them, the war never ended.

Instead, they've spent more than 50 years haunted by memories of the atrocities inflicted upon them by the Japanese Imperial Army, from 1938 to 1945. For the Japanese military sexual slaves, euphemistically called "comfort women," time has not eased the pain of their past.

More than 200,000 girls and young women from Japanese-occupied countries—Korea, China, Indonesia, East Timor, the Philippines and other Asian-Pacific countries, were kidnapped, deceived and forced into military sexual slavery by the Japanese military. It is estimated that 80 percent of the comfort women were Korean.

For many years, the former comfort women kept silent about Japan's military sexual slavery practice during World War II. The issue of sexually violent war crimes was ignored during the 1946 International Military Tribunal for the Far East. For many years, the issue was ignored until a number of Japanese historians, most notably Yoshimi Yoshiaki, produced documents proving such a systematic method of sexual slavery existed.

In the last 10 years, the comfort women have found support for their issues through women's groups and human rights groups around the world. The issue was



(top) Indai Sajor speaks with former comfort women looking on. (above) North Korean former comfort woman Eun Rye Kim.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEPHEN WUNROW

strengthened when the first comfort woman spoke out, prompting other women to step forward.

The final judgment event of the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery, held in The Hague, Netherlands, December 3 and 4, was a symbolic location for the Tribunal participants. According to Indai Sajor, one of the Tribunal's convenors, The Hague has a worldwide reputation for being the place to seek international justice. It is hoped that by being held in The Hague, it will prompt other countries to press Japan to admit to its past history

and apologize to its victims as well as compensate them.

Currently, the Japanese government continues to deny its role in establishing the military sexual slavery system during World War II, even going as far as barely mentioning it in official school textbooks.

The Tribunal made a bold move when it held the first International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery in Tokyo in December 2000. The arrival and participation of 70 victims made a statement that the victims would face their perpetrators and demand accountability on their turf.

"Our lives were ruined and our youth was stolen," said Jan Ruff-O'Herne, an Australian who was a young adult in the Dutch East Indies at the time she was forced into sexual slavery. O'Herne was taken from her family's plantation and, for three months during World War II, forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese military. Ruff-O'Herne was one of 10 former comfort women who attended the Tribunal in The Hague and who was also at the Tokyo event a year ago.

The event in The Hague was a continuation of the Tokyo event, at which prosecutors presented evidence and testimony on

behalf of the victims. The judges delivered a preliminary verdict, that Emperor Hirohito and the government of Japan during World War II were guilty of war crimes against humanity, according to the accepted international law of that time.

In the year since, prosecutors have consolidated and evaluated all the evidence to be presented at The Hague for a final judgment. The international panel of judges presiding over the Tribunal were Gabrielle Kirk McDonald, former president of the International War Crimes Tribunal on the Former Yugoslavia; Carmen Argibay, former president, International Women's Association of Judges; Christine Chinkin, professor of law, University of London; and Willy Muntunga, president, Commission on Human Rights in Kenya.

On December 3, prosecutors representing nine countries—North and South Korea, the People's Republic of China, the Philippines, Taiwan, East Timor, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia and the Netherlands—presented capsulized versions of the charges that were brought against Japan a year earlier. On December 4, the judges delivered the final and official judgment.

The judges found Emperor Hirohito, Matsui Iwane, Hata Shunroku, Terauchi Hisaichi, Itagaki Seishiro, Tojo Hedeki, Umezu Yoshijiro, Kobayashi Sieszo, and Ando Rikichi guilty of