

Carl Bildt  
Foreign Minister of Sweden  
Presidency of the EU

Brussels, 14 October 2009  
REF.: B906

Dear Mr Bildt,

**Subject: Wartime sexual slaves – ‘comfort women’**

In view of the important role of the Swedish Presidency in building the EU's relationship with the newly elected government of Japan, Amnesty International would like to bring to your attention a human rights concern in Japan which the European Parliament has been very vocal on, and which we hope you will take the opportunity to raise with your counterparts. We refer to the pressing need for acknowledgement, apology and compensation for former "comfort women".

From 1932 to the end of World War II, the government of Japan officially ordered the acquisition of an estimated 200 000 young women and girls – euphemistically known as "comfort women" - for the sole purpose of sexual servitude to the Japanese Imperial Army. The "comfort women" system included gang rape, forced abortions, humiliation, and sexual violence resulting in mutilation, death or eventual suicide, in what has been described as one of the largest cases of human trafficking in the 20th century.

To date the government of Japan has failed to adequately acknowledge and apologize for this system of forced military sexual slavery. Women drafted into military sexual slavery have suffered from physical and mental ill-health, isolation, shame and often extreme poverty as a result of their enslavement. The very limited compensation offered by the government of Japan has failed to meet international standards. The continued denial of justice prolongs the humiliation and suffering of these women, which Amnesty International considers to be a serious and on-going human rights violation.

Over the past three years, the USA, Canada, the Netherlands, South Korea and Taiwan have all passed resolutions calling on the government of Japan to provide justice for these women. In Japan nine city councils have passed resolutions calling on the government of Japan to resolve this issue. UN Treaty Bodies including the Human Rights Committee, the Committee against Torture and most recently the Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in August 2009 have all called on the government of Japan to provide justice to the survivors of Japan's military sexual slavery system. On 13 December 2007, the European Parliament also passed a resolution calling on the Council of the European Union to use its dialogue with the Japanese government to urge them to formally accept historical and legal responsibility for the subjugation and enslavement of comfort women and to refute publicly any claims that this never occurred. As far as Amnesty International is aware, the Council has not followed up this resolution at either the 2008 or the 2009 EU-Japan Summit, nor has it raised the issue in its human rights dialogue with Japan.

In line with the European Parliament's resolution, Amnesty International urges the Presidency to add the voice of the Council of the European Union to the call on the new Japanese government to give high priority to the promotion and protection of human rights and in particular to acknowledge, apologize to, and compensate, the victims of the comfort women system.

Yours sincerely,



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