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## **SOUTH KOREA: Seoul court orders Japan to compensate 12 Korean sex slaves**

By Hyung-Jin Kim

AP News (08.01.2021) - <https://bit.ly/2XANrzB> - A South Korean court on Friday ordered Japan to financially compensate 12 South Korean women forced to work as sex slaves for Japanese troops during World War II, a landmark ruling that's set to rekindle animosities between the Asian neighbors.

Japan immediately protested the ruling, maintaining that all wartime compensation issues were resolved under a 1965 treaty that restored their diplomatic ties.

The Seoul Central District Court ruled the Japanese government must give 100 million won (\$91,360) each to the 12 aging women who filed the lawsuits in 2013 for their wartime sexual slavery.

The court said Japan's mobilization of these women as sexual slaves was "a crime against humanity." It said it happened when Japan "illegally occupied" the Korean Peninsula from 1910-45, and its sovereign immunity cannot shield it from lawsuits in South Korea.

The court said the women were the victims of "harsh sexual activities" by Japanese soldiers who caused them bodily harm, venereal diseases and unwanted pregnancies and left "big mental scars" in the women's lives.

The proceedings in the case had been delayed as Japan refused to receive legal documents. Seven of the 12 women died while waiting for the ruling.

Another 20 women, some already diseased and represented by their surviving relatives, filed a separate suit against Japan, and that ruling is expected next week.

The women were among tens of thousands across occupied Asia and the Pacific who were sent to front-line Japanese military brothels. About 240 South Korean women came forward and registered with the government as victims of sexual slavery, but only 16 of them, all in their 80s and 90s, are still alive.

Observers say it's unlikely for Japan to abide by the South Korean court ruling. A support group for women forced to work as sex slaves said it may take legal steps to seize Japanese government assets in South Korea if Japan refuses to compensate victims.

Japan's Foreign Ministry said in a statement that Vice Foreign Minister Takeo Akiba had summoned South Korean Ambassador Nam Gwan-pyo to register Tokyo's protest of the ruling.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato also called the ruling “extremely regrettable,” saying “the Japanese government cannot accept this by any means.”

South Korea’s Foreign Ministry said later Friday it respects the ruling and will strive to restore the dignity of the women. It said it will examine the verdict’s possible effects on ties with Japan and make efforts to maintain “future-oriented” cooperation with Tokyo.

Seoul and Tokyo, both key U.S. allies, are closely linked to each other economically and culturally. But their historical and territorial disputes stemming from Japan’s colonial occupation have often complicated Washington’s efforts to strengthen trilateral cooperation to deal with North Korea’s nuclear threat and China’s growing influence in the region.

Their relations plunged to one of their lowest levels in decades after South Korea’s Supreme Court in 2018 ordered Japanese companies to offer reparations to some elderly South Korean plaintiffs for their wartime forced labor. The spat escalated into a trade war that saw both countries downgrade the other’s trade status, and then spilled over to military matters when Seoul threatened to end a trilateral 2016 military intelligence-sharing agreement involving the U.S.

In 2015, South Korea’s previous government reached a deal with Japan to resolve the sexual slavery dispute.

Under the deal, Japan offered a fresh apology and agreed to fund a foundation to support victims in return for South Korea stopping to criticize Japan over the issue on the world stage. But South Korea’s current government, led by President Moon Jae-in, took steps to dissolve the foundation, saying the 2015 deal lacked legitimacy because officials failed to properly communicate with victims before reaching it.

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## **IRAN: Iran gov’t approves bill to combat violence against women**

***Masoumeh Ebtekar, vice president for women and family affairs, dedicated the move to ‘worthy and patient Iranian women’ in a tweet.***

By Maziar Motamedi

Al Jazeera (04.01.2021) - <https://bit.ly/35dPcqk> - The government of Iran’s President Hassan Rouhani has approved a longstanding bill that aims to better protect women against domestic and other forms of violence.

In a meeting on Sunday evening, cabinet ministers greenlit the draft bill, called Protection, Dignity and Security of Women Against Violence, which has been in the works since the administration of former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

The bill must now be reviewed and approved by the parliament, after which it will be sent to the powerful constitutional vetting body called the Guardian Council, consisting of jurists and religious experts.

The most senior woman in Rouhani’s outgoing government hailed the move, which she said was the result of hundreds of hours of work by tens of legal experts, judges, executives and officials.

Masoumeh Ebtekar, vice president for women and family affairs, dedicated the 58-article bill to “worthy and patient Iranian women” in a tweet.

The legislation completed its lengthy process of review by the judiciary in September 2019.

It defines violence as “any behavior inflicted on women due to sexuality, vulnerable position or type of relationship, and inflicts harm to their body, psyche, personality and dignity, or restricts or deprives them of legal rights and freedoms”.

It obligates the judiciary to create offices to support victims of violence and hold educational courses for judges and other judiciary staff.

The bill also envisages the formation of a fund by the judiciary to support victims of violence and help imprisoned women, among other things.

The state broadcaster is also directed by the legislation to produce more programmes that promote the support of women and the prevention of violence against them as family values.

Moreover, the bill sees a role for the ministry of education in holding educational courses for students, teachers and parents, and in better identifying vulnerable students.

The ministry of health, on the other hand, is tasked by the draft bill to boost its medical and psychological services to women and train experts in handling women who have fallen victim to violence.

Law enforcement and prison organisations are among other entities that will have to increase their efforts as part of the vision laid out in the legislation.

In a report published last month, rights group Human Rights Watch said the bill had several positive provisions, including those that engaged different parts of the government and other entities in women’s issues.

But the New York-based organisation said the bill “falls short of international standards” as it does not criminalise some forms of gender-based violence, including marital rape and child marriage.

The bill was finalised by the government after several high-profile incidents concerning women that took centre stage nationally during the past year.

In late May 2020, a 14-year-old girl called Romina Ashrafi was gruesomely beheaded by her father in an apparent case of “honour-killing”. The father was given a nine-year jail sentence.

In September, decades-old sexual traumas were unearthed as Iranian women launched their own version of the global #MeToo movement on social media.

The movement implicated several high-profile artists and one major company, and led to at least one arrest.