

January, 2018

## Time for Civil Discourse and Behavior

Women's Column of Strength, the San Francisco memorial dedicated to Japanese military sexual slaves, historically called "comfort women," unveiled on September 22, 2017. This memorial is a symbol of the collective voice denouncing the past injustices afflicted upon "comfort women" by the Japanese military. It also offers victims a modicum of healing for their suffering.

But for some this memorial is a mainspring for unreasonable rhetoric and behavior. Following the installation, Osaka Mayor Hirofumi Yoshimura demanded a veto of the 2015 resolution passed unanimously by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors to build a "comfort women" memorial. On September 29, 2017, he notified the late San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee he would terminate the Osaka – San Francisco sister city relationship if his demand was unmet: "I am gravely concerned that by regarding uncertain and one-sided claims as historical facts and inscribing them onto the plaque would not be squarely facing the past, but rather a criticism of Japan." After the memorial became available to the general public on October 17, 2017, Mayor Hirofumi Yoshimura repeated the same demand on November 15, 2017: "Our city has received deep concerns and opinions in regards to the Comfort Women Memorial being situated in San Francisco." On November 21, 2017, one day before the Mayor Ed Lee signed the acceptance of this memorial as a gift to the city, Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan, repeated the same demand to Mayor Ed Lee, a clear demonstration of domestic interference and uncivil discourse.

Unfortunately, the uncivil discourse and behavior from Yoshimura and Abe are hardly rare in today's international politics. Donald Trump and Kim Jung Un also have been publicly exchanging hateful and bellicose rhetoric:

"If we push the buttons to annihilate the enemies even right now, all bases of provocations will be reduced to seas in flames and ashes in a moment." (March 7, 2016, Kim)

"They will be met with fire and fury like the world has never seen." (August 9, 2017, Trump)

"(I would) watch a little more the foolish and stupid conduct of the Yankees." (August 15, 2017, Kim)

"Totally destroy North Korea" (September 19, 2017 Trump)

"Crush loser terrorists", "Rocket Man" (September 19, 2017, Trump)

North Korea described Trump as a "destroyer" who "begged for nuclear war" during his tour of Asia. Then, on a statement lashing out at Trump, North Korea also referred to him as a "dotard," (November 11, 2017, Kim).

In response, Trump said, "I would NEVER call him 'short and fat?'" (November 11, 2017, Trump)

In a New Year's speech, Kim said that North Korea possesses a reliable and "irreversible" nuclear deterrent and added that a nuclear button is on his desk at all times. (January 1, 2018, Kim)

"I too have a Nuclear Button, but it is a much bigger & more powerful one than his, and my Button works!" (January 2, 2018, Trump)

In another example of uncivil discourse and behavior, Makoto Sakurai, the leader of the nationalist group Zaitokukai announced on the Internet that he would send Lee Shin-hye, a Zainichi Korean freelance writer, a curse of death and called her "a Korean crone" on the internet and during right-wing rallies in 2013. His words inspired a 28-year-old office worker who wrote on Twitter, "Let's expel Koreans, the good ones and bad ones, and let's kill that woman," referring to Lee. In 2014, Lee filed a damages suit for defaming her through hate speech with the Osaka District Court.

Undeterred by the hateful rhetoric, in 2016, Lee described hate speech as a virus which originates from the internet and plagues the world. She added, "The virus should be dealt with by vaccines that can be education and people-to-people exchanges. It is up to general citizens to change society. In that sense, everybody ought to have awareness not to tolerate discrimination." Although Japan does not have anti-discrimination laws, the Japanese courts agreed with Lee and on November 29, 2017 she won the suit. Before the court decision, Lee said she "will win them no matter what and the victory will be not only mine but also ours." Without a doubt, people who support anti-discrimination and hate-speech won with her.

Indeed, uncivil and hateful discourse and behavior does not contribute to peaceful or democratic solutions. The citizens in Osaka know this. Despite the rhetoric from their government, several civic groups and residents from Osaka wrote to the San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee expressing their support for the installation of the memorial in San Francisco. They wrote:

- "The 'Comfort Women' Memorial of your city defends dignity of the women, who were forced to become 'comfort women' by Japanese armed forces (and) honors their struggle." (International Labor Solidarity Committee of Doro-Chiba, November 20, 2017)
- "The opposition against establishment of the memorial expressed by Jun Yoshida, the Consul General of Japan in San Francisco, and Osaka Mayor [Hiroufmi] Yoshimura reflects only a small group of people, who are also attempting to

introduce detrimental changes to the Japanese constitution, promote wars, divide up laborers, and drive people into poverty. A vast majority of laborers and people do not share their views." (Education Workers' Committee at the Kansai Coordinating Center of Labor Unions, November 12, 2017)

- "We would like to add again lastly that the words and deeds of Osaka Mayor Yoshimura do not reflect the thoughts of citizens in Osaka at all. Most of the Japanese working class people are hoping that the statue of 'comfort women' would will become a public monument in San Francisco." {Democratic Women's Club National Conference, November 20, 2017)
- "The citizens of Osaka are not in agreement to support Osaka's Mayor demands. I, for one, would like to work hard, so that the City of Osaka and the District of Osaka would confront Japan's war-time crimes with sincerity." (Osaka resident)

North Korea invited Jeffrey Feltman, the United Nations Under-Secretary for General Political Affairs, for a visit from December 5 to December 8, 2017. Upon returning the from trip, the first trip to North Korea by a top UN official in six years, Feltman said there's an "urgent need to prevent miscalculations and open channels to reduce the risks of conflict." He added, "Time is of the essence," emphasizing his commitment to an urgent peaceful resolution.

No one is immune from injustice. Everyone suffers from injustice either directly or indirectly. Spitting uncivil and bellicose rhetoric does nothing for redressing injustice. It only escalates the possibility of waging in a conflict and ultimately war. One common message the survivors of the "comfort women" system stress is not to start of war again and further increase victims of sexual crimes.

Engagement in civil discourse and behavior is the first step people, especially leaders, need to take. The citizens in Osaka know this and we join with them voicing our desire for peace, justice and a return to civil discourse. Like Feltman, we believe that time is of the essence.

I hope 2018 brings much needed civility, truth, and justice to light.

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