

August 9, 2019

The Education for Social Justice Foundation (ESJF) denounces the ironic and uncivil decision announced on August 3 to shut down the exhibit, After “Lack of Freedom of Expression?” 「表現の不自由展・その後」. We urge the exhibit to reopen immediately.

Nagoya Mayor Takashi Kawamura who demanded the shutdown argued that “the exhibition could give the wrong impression that Japan accepts a South Korean claim that comfort women [Japanese military sex slaves] were forcibly taken by the Japanese military...”[1] One of the pieces on display was the *Peace Girl* statue, which symbolizes a victim of Japanese military sexual slavery. The organizers of the Aichi Triennale 2019, Taming Y/Our Passion 「情の時代」, decided to shut down the exhibit instead of running it until October 14. The exhibit space is now covered up by blank barricades depriving people of more than twenty art pieces at the exhibit, After “Lack of Freedom of Expression?”

Shutting down an exhibit, especially without consulting the artists, is a grave suppression of freedom of expression and political violence. One of the pieces on display was done by a minor back in December 2016.

In April 2017, 11th grader Yon-Su Jo experienced injustice when the city funding to the Chiba Korean Elementary and Middle School was cut because she and her friend presented art pieces advocating justice for Japanese military sex slaves, which the Chiba mayor found problematic. As a result, he cut funding to the school as an unfair punitive measure. At the 2019 Aichi Triennale, she is experiencing yet another injustice associated with freedom of expression, which is the essence of democracy.

In addition to protecting the freedom of expression of the people, it is the humble duty of democratic society to provide a just and safe environment for the young generation, but the organizers of the Aichi Triennale 2019 have done completely the opposite. Shutting down freedom of expression is wrong. Shutting down freedom of minors’ expression is even more wrong and shameful.

The Japanese Centre of PEN International, a writers’ organization, released the following statement on August 3: “Eliminating the space for communication between creator and viewer robs art of its meaning and quashes the spirit of freedom, which is the driving force of society.”

The Japan Art Association has protested against the shutdown of the exhibition by stating “Succumbing to pressure from the government and threatening is a serious infringement on freedom of expression.”

Aichi Governor Hideaki Omura said, “Highly likely, this decision violates Article 21 of the Constitution, which guarantees freedom of expression.”

We urge the exhibit to reopen immediately.