



Media Release

4 August 2016

About the Comfort Woman Statue

Last year Strathfield Council unanimously declined the proposal to erect a comfort woman statue with a genuine reason. The statue was not only breaching council policy but also unwanted by the majority of the community simply because it was only dividing the community while the matter was totally unrelated to the community. We should respect the decision. One of the councilors who voted against said at the end of the extraordinary meeting in which the decision was made "Go home as Australian". That is the spirit we represent.

We have been deeply shocked by the fact that Rev Crews of Uniting Church Ashfield suddenly appeared over the Internet is publicly calling the Japanese “perpetrators” and demanding apology in public. He does not explain why he is then supporting the Korean group trying to jeopardize the governmental agreement between Japan & South Korea to formally settle the matter. It appears a sheer contradiction to us. Rev Crews declared that he is going to erect the comfort woman statue on his church grounds facing the public road to pressure “perpetrators” to apologize. Obviously he considers the local Japanese community “perpetrators”. He also commented “It is dividing the community anyway, so just apologize.” This is far more than just “honoring comfort women” and this is the clear evidence that the statue always comes with hatred and aggression. It is extremely unfair for the Japanese community having to face this kind of one-sided intimidation while the matter has got nothing to do with the local community where we have been living in harmony with all other ethnic groups. It is in addition a breach of the Racial Discrimination Laws of Australia.

The Korean group has been running anti-Japan campaigns across Sydney. They are driven by a political activist group based in Seoul sharply confronting their own government by trying to jeopardize the governmental agreement that Australian government also supports. This is clearly a politically motivated activity rather than a pure commemoration. It is also a contradiction that they demand apology while they try to boycott the governmental agreement by running anti-Japan campaigns. Most former comfort women are welcoming the agreement and only some women under the activist group’s influence are opposing as they always do. The Korean group does not



seem to care the proven fact that the South Korean government was running their own comfort woman system during the Korean War and Vietnam War and still refusing to apologize to both Korean and Vietnamese women who were brutalized by South Korean soldiers. The Japanese government offered apology many times. It is pointless and even hypocritical to one-sidedly blame others without reflecting on their own acts. We should not discriminate women who suffered in war.

Accordingly we do not consider the statue a “peace monument”, particularly in view of the aggressive language accompanying the discussion. We are a group of mums and dads determined to protect our local community and our children from any racially agitated discrimination that already happened overseas where such statues were erected. We can always talk about history but community harmony must come first.

We request Rev Bill Crews immediately stop his irrelevant intimidation of the local Japanese community and simply support the efforts of the two governments trying to finally settle the sensitive matter. There are many Uniting Church members opposing his acts and we do not understand why he is ignoring them. We wish to avoid any further conflict by way of litigation and so we also urge the Korean Society of Sydney to peacefully hold whatever ceremony on Saturday inside their premises leased from the Council without any aggression and/or intimidation towards other ethnic groups and follow a number of conditions and the guide not to display the statue in public view even inside the building given by the Canterbury-Bankstown Council. We all respect freedom of speech but at the same time we respect the Anti-Discrimination laws of Australia and we are responsible to maintain and protect community harmony that is the essential element of Australian multiculturalism.

Lastly we express our appreciation for the efforts of the Council and in particular their letter to our lawyer Rick Mitry dated today in which conditions require activities in relation to the Statue to be discreet and say ‘Council has, is, and will always remain committed to all sections of our community without favour’.

Tesshu Yamaoka
President, Australia-Japan Community Network



A scene of an unveiling ceremony in California



Placards carried by Korean activists