

# Memories of War Times: Korean ‘Comfort women’ statue installed near the Japanese consulate in Busan and elsewhere

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## **‘Comfort women’ statue installed near Japanese consulate in Busan**

SEOUL – A civic group on Friday installed a statue symbolizing women forced to work in Japanese wartime military brothels in front of the Japanese Consulate in Busan, a move that could strain Japan-South Korea relations.

The local ward office had said two days earlier that it would remove the statue if it was installed, but earlier Friday it reversed course, saying it would not forcibly remove the 1-ton figure.

“We will not stop the civic group from installing the statue in front of the consulate if they wish to do so,” city official Park Sam-seok told a news conference, according to Yonhap News Agency.

In response to the news, Japan’s Vice Foreign Minister Shinsuke Sugiyama told South Korea’s Ambassador to Japan Lee Joon-gyu by phone that the erection of the statue in Busan was “extremely regrettable,” and called for its immediate removal.

He also said the installation of the statue was in violation of the spirit of a deal on the issue struck between the two countries a year ago, and that it would unfavorably influence bilateral ties.

The group installed the statue, which is similar to another erected in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, as part of their protest against a deal reached between Japan and South Korea last year to settle the issue of the so-called comfort women.

According to a live video streamed by the civic group, the statue was carried by forklift to the front of the consulate on Friday, as members of the group chanted “Victory to the people!” It plans to hold an unveiling ceremony on Saturday.

On Wednesday, the civic group tried to erect the statue on the sidewalk in front of the consulate, but police and officials confiscated it for obstructing a road.

The ward office was subsequently inundated with phone calls critical of the clampdown. An online forum on its website was temporarily out of service due to a flood of angry posts.

The Japanese government has requested the removal of the statue installed in front of the Seoul embassy, claiming that it breaches the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, an international treaty that outlines a framework for diplomacy.

Under the deal between Japan and South Korea reached in December last year, the two countries agreed to resolve the issue “finally and irreversibly.” South Korea set up a foundation into which Japan has deposited ¥1 billion to care for the surviving victims and their families.

Neither government mentioned the removal of the statue as a condition for Tokyo’s financial contribution, but South Korea said that it “will strive to solve this issue in an appropriate manner.”

KYODO, DEC 30, 2016

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<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/12/30/national/comfort-woman-statue-installed-near-japanese-consulate-busan/#.WHMyM7F7TgE>

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## **S Korea allows new ‘comfort woman’ statue in Busan**

**Busan authorities say activists are free to place a symbolically charged “comfort woman” statue outside the port’s Japanese consulate**

The southern South Korean port of Busan said Friday it would allow activists to place a statue symbolising victims of Japanese wartime sex slavery outside the city’s Japanese consulate.

The municipal authorities had previously removed the “comfort woman” statue, but changed track after Japan’s hawkish defence minister offered prayers at a controversial war shrine in Tokyo.

Tomomi Inada’s visit on Thursday to Yasukuni shrine, which honors millions of mostly Japanese war dead—but also senior military and political figures convicted of war crimes—swiftly drew flack from China and South Korea.

Activists had first placed their statue outside the consulate on Wednesday—marking their opposition to a South Korea-Japan agreement reached a year ago to finally resolve the comfort women issue.

Under the accord, which both countries described as “final and irreversible,” Japan offered an apology and a one-billion yen (\$8.3 million) payment to surviving Korean comfort women.

Critics said the deal did not go far enough in holding Japan responsible for its wartime abuses.

The statue—a copy of one that sits across the road from the Japanese embassy in Seoul—was swiftly removed from outside the Busan consulate by the authorities.

But after Inada’s visit stoked an outpouring of public anger, they said it would be returned to the activists.

“We won’t stop the civic group from setting up the statue there if they wish to do so,” Yonhap news agency quoted local official Park Sam-Seok as saying.

The statue in Seoul—a bronze of a young, seated woman with a small bird on her shoulder—has proved an extremely potent and popular symbol.

Japan says it should have been removed after the comfort-women accord was signed, but Seoul argued it had only agreed to look into the possibility of moving it.

For the past year, activists have maintained a 24-hour vigil to prevent the statue being taken away.

More than two dozen similar monuments have been erected around South Korea, and another dozen or so abroad in the United States, Canada and elsewhere

AFP, SEOUL

\* DEC. 31, 2016 - 07:00AM JST:

<https://www.japantoday.com/category/politics/view/s-korea-allows-new-comfort-woman-statue-in-busan>

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## **Japan recalls Korean envoy over 'comfort women' statue**

**South Korean activists set up the statue outside the Japanese consulate in Busan on 28 December.**

Japan has temporarily withdrawn its ambassador to South Korea, amid an escalating row over a statue representing wartime sex slaves.

The statue was installed by activists outside the Japanese consulate in the South Korean city of Busan last month.

South Korea has long called for reparations for “comfort women”, who were forced to work in Japanese military brothels during World War Two.

Japan says the statue violates a previous agreement on the issue.

### **Why is the statue such a big deal?**

The 1.5m-tall (5ft) bronze statue depicts a young, barefoot woman sitting in a chair. It has become a symbol of hardships faced by the women and the perceived lack of adequate apology and compensation from Japan.

Many of the estimated 200,000 women forced to be wartime sex slaves were Korean. Others came from China, the Philippines, Indonesia and Taiwan.

It is a perennial issue that has dogged relations with Japan.

The matter has only escalated with each passing year as many of the survivors are old and dying. About 46 survivors are thought to remain in South Korea.

### **Is it the only statue?**

No. In fact a more famous statue is outside the Japanese embassy in the South Korean capital, Seoul.

It was put up in 2011 to mark the 1,000<sup>th</sup> rally by activists calling for an apology and compensation.

Another 37 are thought to exist in South Korea, while in Australia a similar statue has sparked a row between Korean and Japanese community groups.

### **What has happened in the latest incident?**

South Korean activists put up the statue in Busan on 28 December as a protest against a deal struck exactly one year before, in which Japan apologised and promised to give 1bn yen (£7m; \$8.6m) to a fund for Korean women.

Critics say it was reached without consultation with victims, did not contain Japan's acknowledgement of legal responsibility, and did not provide direct compensation to the victims.

Busan police initially removed the statue but there was fierce domestic pressure for it to remain, reported The Korea Herald.

Days later, after Japan's defence minister visited a controversial war shrine in Tokyo, local authorities allowed it to be reinstalled.

### **What has Japan said about this?**

Japan says the statue violates the 2015 deal, which agreed that Japan's reparations would "finally and irreversibly" resolve the issue.

In a statement on Friday, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said it was important that both countries carry out their agreement.

It has withdrawn its Busan consul-general and South Korean ambassador. It also suspended a currency swap and postponed high-level economic discussions.

"We have repeatedly asked South Korea to handle the resolution of this issue appropriately, but the situation has not improved, so we have taken this action," Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said.

The statues have been a constant source of irritation for the Japanese.

Japan has previously claimed the statue outside its Seoul embassy is illegal as it breaches the 1961 Vienna Convention, which dictates that host countries must protect the premises of diplomatic missions.

BBC

\* <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-38526914>

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## **Japan recalls envoy to South Korea over new 'comfort woman' statue**

**Besides the recall of ambassador Yasumasa Nagamine, Japan is ordering home its consul-general in Busan and suspending discussions over a Japan-South Korea currency swap.**

TOKYO, Japan – Japan recalled its ambassador to South Korea Friday, January 6, to protest the placing of a statue symbolizing victims of Japanese wartime sex slavery outside its consulate in the city of Busan last month.

In a move likely to reignite the decades-old feud over the so-called “comfort women”, Chief government spokesman Yoshihide Suga also announced that high-level economic discussions would be postponed.

“Japan and South Korea are neighbors,” Suga said. “It’s a very important country. It’s extremely regrettable we had to take this action.”

“We have repeatedly and strongly requested to the Korean side to take appropriate action to solve this problem,” he added.

“But at this moment, the situation hasn’t improved. That’s why we informed them of these actions.”

The statue – a copy of one that sits across the road from the Japanese embassy in Seoul – was initially removed after being set up by South Korean activists in the southern port city on Wednesday last week, December 28.

But local authorities changed tack and did not stop the activists from putting it back after Japan’s hawkish defense minister Tomomi Inada offered prayers at a controversial war shrine in Tokyo last week.

Inada’s visit last Thursday, January 5 to the Yasukuni Shrine, which honors millions of mostly Japanese war dead – but also senior military and political figures convicted of war crimes – drew harsh criticism in South Korea as well as China.

### **‘Very regrettable’**

Besides the recall of ambassador Yasumasa Nagamine, Suga also said Japan is ordering home its consul-general in Busan and suspending discussions over a Japan-South Korea currency swap.

“The Japanese government will continue to strongly urge the South Korean government as well as municipalities concerned to quickly remove the statue of the girl,” Suga said.

Japan’s decision was described as “very regrettable” by South Korean Foreign Ministry Spokesman Cho June-Hyuck.

“Even if there exist difficult issues, the government emphasizes again that it will continue developing South Korea-Japan relations based on trust between the two governments.”

Activists had first placed the new statue outside the consulate to mark their opposition to a South Korea-Japan agreement reached a year ago to finally resolve the “comfort women” issue.

Under that accord, which both countries described as “final and irreversible,” Japan offered an apology and a one-billion yen (\$8.6 million) payment to surviving Korean comfort women.

But critics said the deal did not go far enough in holding Japan responsible for its wartime abuses.

The statue in Seoul – a bronze of a young, seated woman with a small bird on her shoulder – has proved an extremely potent and popular symbol.

Japan says it should have been removed after the comfort-women accord was signed, but Seoul argued it had only agreed to look into the possibility of moving it.

For the past year, activists have maintained a 24-hour vigil to prevent the statue being taken away.

More than two dozen similar monuments have been erected around South Korea, and another dozen or so abroad in the United States, Canada and elsewhere. –

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\* Rappler.com. Fri, Jan 6, 2017 7:13 AM:

<http://www.rappler.com/world/regions/asia-pacific/157685-japan-pm-urges-south-korea-remove-comfort-woman-statue>

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