

Methodists decry Japanese stance on 'comfort women' A WWII-era denial: A WWII-era denial

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Asian American United Methodists, including those with Japanese ancestry, are strongly criticizing recent denials by the prime minister of Japan regarding that country's coercion of "comfort women" during World War II, according to United Methodist News Service.

"Your denial places you in the category of those who deny the Holocaust against six million Jews," wrote Bishop Roy Sano, executive secretary of the United Methodist Council of Bishops, in a letter to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

Three women—two Koreans and a former Dutch colonist—testified March 1 in Washington before the House foreign affairs subcommittee about how they were forced to serve as sex slaves for Japanese soldiers. About 200,000 women are thought to have been enslaved as "comfort women" during that period.

In 1993, the Japanese government admitted its military had established brothels for its troops during the war. But Abe, speaking March 5 in Japan's Parliament, blamed any coercion of women into the brothels on contractors used by Japan's military, not on the military itself, reported the *New York Times*.

Abe said Japan would not comply if the U.S. Congress issues a demand for an apology. Such a resolution, which blames Japanese authorities for the coercion, is now under consideration, the newspaper said.

Sano wrote Abe that he joins with those "who demand you renounce your statement and apologize for your indefensible denial of the atrocities inflicted on 200,000 women from various parts of Asia."

Sano, born in California of immigrant Japanese parents, was not noted for being publicly outspoken on controversies as a UMC bishop in Los Angeles from 1992 to

2000. But Sano indicated that Abe's comments could have repercussions for both Japanese citizens and Japanese Americans.

"As a Nisei in the U.S. during World War II, I want to remind you that actions by Japan turn us into the most accessible target to vent anger and hatred," he said.

Sano's strong words echoed a resolution passed by the 2004 United Methodist General Conference, the denomination's top legislative body. That quadrennial meeting called upon the Japanese government to issue "a full and frank apology" for the establishment of the comfort system, to compensate the victims and survivors and to recognize and honor those women through memorials, a museum and a library.

In a separate statement, Methodist bishop Robert Hoshibata of Portland, Oregon, said it is "incomprehensible that a world leader has taken a stand that contradicts accepted fact"—namely, that women were forced into sexual slavery "and subjected to inhumane treatment, violence, injury and death."

Mark Nakagawa and Inday Day, chair and executive director of the National Federation of Asian American United Methodists, expressed support for the bishops' statements.