

Verification Results of Kono Statement and Japan's Deceptive Practices

Hosaka Yuji (Professor of Sejong University, Political Science)

The Japanese government submitted and disclosed the report on the verification results of the Kono Statement on June 20th to the Budget Committee of the House of Representatives of Japan. The core of the disclosed report was that, firstly, the Kono Statement was prepared through written discourse between Korea and Japan, secondly, Korea and Japan agreed to maintain confidentiality of the written discourse, and thirdly, the Japanese government did not validate the interview contents after interviewing comfort women victims.

However, the fact that Korea and Japan coordinated on the written discourse of the Kono Statement does not pose a problem. The Kono Statement contains contents on the comfort women victims not only from Korea, but from China, Taiwan, Southeast Asia, and Europe, however, it is reasonable for Korea, which was the most affected among the countries, to express an opinion on the text.

The Korean government acknowledged the fact that it issued feedback on the draft of the Statement provided by the Japanese government, and the Japanese government also recognized that it was the agent of drafting the Kono Statement. Thus, there is no big concern with the fact that there was coordinated discourse between Korea and Japan.

Moreover, there is a need for Korea to 'verify' this verification result report regarding the allegation made by Japan that both countries agreed to keep the fact of coordinated discourse as confidential. First, such allegations may not be true, and even if such discussion was exchanged, the level of confidentiality is important. If the particular confidential matter was deemed to be important, the fact that the two countries made a secret promise should remain in writing. If there is no such writing, it is possible that the agreement may be in a level of agreement as not to disclose anything due to room for misunderstanding, despite the fact that

there would be no significant issue even when disclosed. Since such statements may appear within diplomatic conversations all the time, no significant issue would occur. The objective of Japan alleging that confidentiality was agreed to seems to be to emphasize that the Kono Statement was a product of political compromise to disregard the truth.

Lastly, the allegation that Japan did not confirm the contents after interviewing the comfort women victims is a huge distortion by the Japanese government trying to emphasize that the Kono Statement was a discourse not based on fact. The Kono Statement was originally prepared by adding the interview results of the comfort women victims based on the facts that were independently surveyed by the Japanese government approximately two years before announcing the Statement, thus, it is important not to overlook the fact that most of the contents of the Kono Statement are based on such prior survey results. In addition, the United Nations Commission of Human Rights (“UNCHR”) implemented a verification process of the Kono Statement for three years after the Statement was publicized, and announced the result in the ‘Kumaraswamy’s Report’ in 1996. Furthermore, the UNCHR announced the ‘McDougall’s Report,’ which surveyed the legal responsibility of Japan to resolve the comfort women issue and Japan’s logic to avoid responsibility regarding the same issue in 1998. Thus, the allegation by the Japanese government that it did not implement a confirmation process after the interview is baseless.

Sankei Newspaper commented that ‘the Kono Statement is a product of political compromise since there was coordinated discourse by both countries,’ however, based on the above facts, the Kono Statement, which sufficiently reflects historical facts, cannot be viewed as a product of political compromise.

Based on the above verification results, Japan is aiming to allege that the legal issues, apology issue, and compensation issue regarding the comfort women victims were all complete by the Korea-Japan Treaty in 1965, the Kono Statement in 1993, and ‘Asia Women’s Fund,’ made by private parties of Japan, and that they can no longer accept the demands made by the Korean government regarding the comfort women issue.

The response by Korea on this issue is as follows. Regarding the right of claim issue within the Korea-Japan Treaty in 1965, the obligation of the nation to protect an individual has expired, as announced by the Japanese government in 1991, however, the true ‘personal right of claim,’ allowing an individual to raise a claim against another country or company has not expired. In addition, as Japan confirmed that it would not revise, the Kono Statement is a document acknowledging the compulsory mobilization of comfort women by the former Japanese army, however, it is not a document that acknowledges the responsibility of a nation, thus, a national apology is needed for that part. Moreover, because the ‘Asia Women’s Fund’ is a movement made by a private group, it cannot substitute for a national apology, and because the survey report by the UNCHR, which sought for the responsibility of Japan and verified the comfort women issue, had sufficiently verified the Kono Statement, the position of Korea will not waver in that that a national apology and compensation by Japan must be achieved. The Japanese government should immediately stop evading responsibility through deceptive practices.