

February 1, 2017

The Honorable Edwin M. Lee
Mayor of San Francisco

Dear Mayor Lee,

On behalf of the citizens of the City of Osaka, I would like to express my sincere gratitude for your continued support towards the sister city exchanges between our cities.

I was made aware that on January 9th, the San Francisco Arts Commission motioned to approve the sculpture design of the Comfort Women Memorial, which is an intended gift to San Francisco by the “Comfort Women” Justice Coalition, and that on January 18th, the Visual Arts Committee of the Arts Commission had unanimously approved the text for the identification plaque after two points of revision.

When the governments of Japan and the Republic of Korea had reached an agreement in December of 2015, the Japanese government stated that the issue of comfort women was a grave affront to the honor and dignity of large numbers of women, and Japan was painfully aware of its responsibilities. Both governments agreed that the issue was “resolved finally and irreversibly,” and that they would “refrain from accusing or criticizing each other in the international community” from then on. That agreement was also supported by the federal government of the United States of America, which is paying close attention to its steady implementation. I acknowledge that Japan has met its responsibility based on the agreement, which includes contributing funds to the foundation established by the government of the Republic of Korea to provide support for the former “comfort women.” The governments of Japan and the Republic of Korea are currently making efforts to implement the agreement. Thus it is truly regrettable, for the act of establishing a Comfort Women Memorial and an identification plaque as a property of San Francisco would be adverse to the spirit of the agreement.

Certainly I think that it is important to squarely face the past and to strive for a world that respects the universal values shared by every country, one of which is the dignity and human rights of women. However, seeing as that there is disagreement among historians regarding the number of “comfort women,” the degree to which the former Japanese Army was involved, and the extent of the wartime harm indicated in the plaque, regarding uncertain and one-sided claims as historical facts and inscribing them in the plaque would not be squarely facing the past but rather a criticism of Japan.

There are many Japanese nationals and Japanese-Americans living in San Francisco. Moreover, many tourists or people on business from all over Japan including Osaka are visiting San Francisco. If the San Francisco Arts Commission approves text that stirs doubt or uncertainty and criticizes exclusively of Japan, and subsequently the plaque that contains that text and the Comfort Women Memorial are set up in a public space, the decision would lead to a disruption in the community. I would be gravely concerned with whether such act will negatively affect the exchange between our cities and ultimately between our countries.

This year should be a commemorative celebration of the 60th Anniversary of Osaka and San Francisco’s sister-city relations. In August of last year, I was also able to meet you in person, and I believe a friendly and trusting relationship was built. I hope that we can build an ever stronger and future-oriented relationship with your city. Thus, as the mayor of your sister city, I strongly hope that you will treat this issue with careful considerations.

Please allow me to send this letter in the form of an open letter to widely reach the citizens of both cities so that they can understand my views.

Sincerely,

Hirofumi Yoshimura
Mayor of Osaka