

October 2, 2018

The Honorable London Breed
Mayor
City and County of San Francisco

Dear Mayor Breed,

Termination of Sister City Relationship

Much to my regret, I must deliver an unfortunate announcement.

As you are aware, the establishment of San Francisco and Osaka's sister city affiliation dates back to October 7, 1957. Thereafter, the two cities have developed genuine mutual understanding and friendship fostered upon meaningful exchanges across various fields, particularly in business, education, and arts. In spite of the prosperous relationship, I am afraid to announce that the City of Osaka must hereby terminate its sister city relationship with the City and County of San Francisco. The grounds to termination shall be detailed as follows.

I must sternly emphasize that the Japanese Government holds a distinctive standpoint on perceiving history, and there is also disagreement among historians when regarding the historical facts such as the number of "comfort women," the degree to which the former Japanese Army was involved, and the extent of the wartime harm. Granted the aforementioned, it was solemnly disappointing when the previous Mayor of San Francisco personally finalized the resolution on November 22, 2017, to accept the Comfort Women Memorial and plaque as a gift with provision of artwork maintenance on public property as an expression of the will of the City and County of San Francisco; a memorial containing inscriptions that present uncertain and one-sided claims as historical facts.

In retrospect to the "Resolution Urging the Establishment of a Memorial for Comfort Women" that was enacted on October 2, 2015, the previous Mayor of Osaka first initiated dialogue by sending a letter addressed to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors on August 27, 2015, to express his grave concerns about the resolution draft in support of

establishing a Comfort Women Memorial. Since then the previous Mayor and myself have reached out to the previous Mayor of San Francisco across seven occasions between September 18, 2015 and November 15, 2017, where we expressed our deepest worries for the implications and repercussions of the resolution, as well as made strong pleas on being against the relocation of the Comfort Women Memorial and plaque onto public property. Regardless, the chain of developments that followed after the signing of this resolution continually progressed towards the current state, in spite of all the steadfast attempts made from Osaka.

Rest assured, it is my utmost intention to squarely face the past, and strive to broadly incorporate movements supporting the dignity and human rights of women, a universal value common to all countries of the world. However, as I intend to explain at greater length, it is also my belief that an inscription appropriate for a Comfort Women Memorial established for the greater good of raising international public awareness on the globally persisting issue of sex trafficking should consist of words equally applicable to all countries.

Unfortunately, the engraved uncertain and one-side claims presented in the finalized inscription has led an acknowledgement of history astray into a political condemnation of Japan, causing disruptions among local communities of San Francisco.

As a matter of fact, even within Japan, the City of Osaka continues to receive countless voices of disappointment regarding the establishment of the Comfort Women Memorial from citizens of Osaka City and beyond.

I am convinced that it is my duty, owed especially to our predecessors and citizens of both cities who have contributed to supporting the extensive grassroots exchanges for the past 60 years, to disclose the bitter process leading up to the much regrettable conclusion to terminate our sister city relationship. Please allow me to convey my concerns with reference to citations of the previous Mayor of Osaka (and myself) from past letters directed to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors and previous Mayor of San Francisco, dating back from August 2015 and onward.

1. We must bring about efforts to strive for a world where the dignity and human rights of women, both having universal value, are protected on the battlefield as well

(The following **bold text** is cited from an open letter dated August 27, 2015, addressed to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.)

In today's 21st century, women's dignity and human rights have been recognized as having universal value. This is indeed an enormous achievement made by humankind. However, in reality, the issue of violations of the dignity of women by soldiers has not been eradicated. We must strive for a future where women's rights are respected all over the world.

What is essential for that purpose is to directly face what has happened in the past and what is happening right now. Each nation in the world, including Japan, should squarely face the past violations of women's rights on the battlefield by its own soldiers. Each nation and its citizens should come together, be fully determined not to repeat the same mistakes in the future, bring about efforts to protect the dignity of women who are under threat in areas of regional conflict in the present-day world, and create a future where women's rights are respected all over the world.

I am in favor of activities to protect the dignity and human rights of women. However, if the purpose is to protect the human rights of women, I would suggest that some of the special attention currently being given to Japan's "comfort women" issue should be broadened to memorialize all the women who have been sexually assaulted and abused by soldiers of countries in the world, and should represent a pledge to the world that we will never allow the same offense and tragedy to happen again.

The violation of the dignity of women by soldiers during wartime is a common problem in many parts of the world. Each nation in the world, including Japan, should address this unacceptable problem as a "common" issue for human beings. It is also an undeniable historical fact that troops of countries around the world as well as those of wartime Japan used women for sexual purposes on the battlefield. It is regrettable that even to this day, there are many news reports on women and children being sexually abused on the battlefield.

2. Reject the denial of the "comfort women" issue; expressing understanding and remorse towards the indescribable pain and suffering inflicted on "comfort women"

(The following **bold** text is cited from an open letter dated August 27, 2015, addressed to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.)

It goes without saying that the use of "comfort women" by Japanese soldiers before and during World War II was an unforgivable act that violated the dignity and human rights of women. I am aware that the great pain inflicted on those who were

forced to work as “comfort women” against their will and the deep emotional scars they have borne afterwards are beyond description.

Therefore, I am not on the side of any attempts to justify Japan’s “comfort women” issue in any sense, nor do I intend to do so in the future. Japan must express deep remorse and offer a sincere apology to former “comfort women,” and show determination not to repeat the same mistakes and tragedies in the future.

3. However, trivializing the issue by singling out Japan will not lead to resolving it as a global issue

(The following **bold text** is cited from an open letter dated August 27, 2015, addressed to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.)

On the other hand, the issue of sex on the battlefield is not a problem particular to the former Japanese army. This problem was present during World War II with the American, British, French, German, and Soviet armies, as well as during the Korean War and Vietnam War with the South Korean Army.

I have no intention to legitimize or defend the problem of “comfort women” by the former Japanese Army just because the other countries have had the same issue. Still, attempts to single out and criticize only Japan will make us blind to other past atrocities and also to contemporary problems of the same kind. This issue should not be treated as an issue specific solely to the Japanese military. As long as widespread sexual problems on the battlefields by countries other than Japan are not openly recognized, past offenses, which the whole world must face, will go uncorrected, and those violations in other parts of the world will not be resolved. This is my biggest concern.

4. Issues surrounding the Comfort Women Memorial and plaque in San Francisco

The problem of the San Francisco Comfort Women Memorial and plaque is embedded within the inscription that presents uncertain and one-sided claims as historical facts. As mentioned in prior letters, the Japanese Government holds a distinctive standpoint when perceiving history and there is also disagreement among historians when regarding the historical facts such as the number of “comfort women,” the degree to which the former Japanese Army was involved, and the extent of the wartime harm.

The inscription states “This monument bears witness to the suffering of hundreds of

thousands of women and girls, euphemistically called ‘Comfort Women,’ who were sexually enslaved by the Japanese Imperial Armed Forces in thirteen Asian-Pacific countries from 1931-1945. Most of these women died during their wartime captivity.” The interpretation of this engraved statement still has yet to be proven with concrete evidence.

(The following **bold text** is cited from an open letter dated August 27, 2015, addressed to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.)

To give an example, the Coomaraswamy Report (submitted in 1996 by Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women to the UN Commission on Human Rights) states that “comfort women” were “military sex slaves.” The testimony of Seiji Yoshida is used as evidence, in which he states that he had “taken part in the slave raids where as many as 1,000 women were obtained for ‘comfort women’ duties.” Yoshida himself has acknowledged that his testimony had been fabricated, and the Asahi Shimbun, which had been reporting on the “comfort women” issue, also concluded Yoshida’s testimony as false on August 5, 2014 and retracted a series of articles that said many Korean women were “forcibly taken away” to become “comfort women.” This caused a big controversy in Japan and is still fresh in our memories.

Against this backdrop, in October 2014, the Japanese Government requested that part of the Coomaraswamy Report (the portion based on Yoshida’s falsified testimony which stated that the Imperial Japanese Army had forcibly taken away “comfort women” from the Republic of Korea) be retracted, but was rejected because Coomaraswamy argued that Yoshida’s testimony was only one part of the evidence. In addition, the Coomaraswamy Report uses *The Comfort Women* written by the journalist George Hicks as the main source of reference; however, researchers have pointed out that this book lacks sufficient evidence.

The Coomaraswamy Report itself is a 50-page-long report on violence against women. The “comfort women” issue is mentioned in the “Report on the mission to the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, the Republic of Korea and Japan on the issue of military sexual slavery in wartime,” which is one of the two documents attached to the report. The United Nations Commission on Human Rights adopted a 6-page resolution called “The Elimination of Violence against Women,” which uses Coomaraswamy’s special report as a reference. The resolution states that it “welcomes” the work of the Special Rapporteur. However, it only “takes note” of the attached document, which means that the document was not highly evaluated

enough to be “welcomed.” If the Coomaraswamy report had been appreciated at the highest level, the resolution would have “commended” it. Therefore, we can conclude that the UN Commission on Human Rights does not “endorse” the notion that “comfort women” were “sex slaves.”

Let me show you another example. During World War II, according to the high school world history textbook *Traditions & Encounters: A Global Perspective on the Past*, published by McGraw-Hill, a major U.S. textbook publisher, “the Japanese army forcibly recruited, conscripted, and dragooned as many as two hundred thousand women age fourteen to twenty to serve in military brothels, called ‘comfort houses’ or ‘consolation centers,’” “others were killed by Japanese soldiers, especially if they tried to escape or contracted venereal diseases,” and “at the end of the war, soldiers massacred large numbers of comfort women to cover up the operation.” The textbook contains many false statements like these that have been introduced in classroom environments as if they were true, even though they are based on the wrong perception and completely contrary to fact. When the Japanese Government asked McGraw-Hill to retract these statements as they contained serious factual errors, the author responded that this request was “an infringement on his freedom of speech and academic freedom.” This is simply wrong. It is he who criticizes the individual pointing out the factual errors who is the one infringing on the freedom of speech and academics.

The “Open letter in support of historians in Japan” released on May 5, 2015 and signed by 187 scholars mainly from the United States has confirmed that there is disagreement among historians regarding the precise number of “comfort women” and regarding the degree to which the former Japanese Army was involved in the recruitment of these women.

Regardless, due to this memorial inscription and the wide media coverage, many people around the world will have an unconfirmed, one-sided view and will accept this as historical truth. I find this highly regrettable.

The memorial inscription concludes its purpose as an oath “dedicated to the memory of these women, and to eradicate sexual violence and sex trafficking throughout the world.” I very much resonate with the sentiment that drives this message. However, once again we eventually arrive at the critical problem that the rest of the inscription are presented as historical facts.

(The following **bold text** is cited from an open letter dated August 27, 2015, addressed to

the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.)

If there is any significance in establishing a “comfort women” memorial, it should be that it serves as a declaration to squarely face the past and strive for a world where every country respects the dignity and human rights of women as a universal value. Thus, if such memorial were to be established, the inscription should be written from this standpoint so that the message can be shared by the whole world.

5. The stance of the Japanese Government, and how it has given sincere care to former “comfort women,” and the determination to create a world that protects the dignity and human rights of women

(The following **bold text** is cited from an open letter dated August 27, 2015, addressed to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.)

Since resolving its legal disputes with the Republic of Korea and China, Japan has also made extra effort to demonstrate its acceptance of moral responsibility for “comfort women” with the establishment of the Asian Women’s Fund in 1995 by soliciting donations from Japanese citizens. The Asian Women’s Fund was started for “comfort women” all over the world, and has provided compensation for “comfort women” from four countries and one region, which include not only the Republic of Korea, but also the Philippines and Indonesia, after discussing the appropriate solutions according to each country’s circumstances. Compensation was offered to former comfort women from China as well, but it is said that the Chinese Government had declined the offer. The Asian Women’s Fund has also sent the Japanese Prime Minister’s letter of apologies and messages from Japanese citizens today. It has taken part in activities to advocate women’s dignity by supporting projects on contemporary issues, such as violence against women, in a manner reflective upon the harm done by Japan’s past atrocities to women’s dignity. In this way, the Japanese Government has made sincere efforts along with the Asian Women’s Fund’s activities.

In addition: (The following **bold text** is cited from an open letter dated February 1, 2017, addressed to the Mayor of San Francisco.)

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.

6. **Request for consideration of Japanese in the U.S., and responsibility to create environment where young generations can live in cooperation without disputes**

(The following **bold text** is cited from an open letter dated August 27, 2015, addressed to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.)

For today’s generation, directly facing past mistakes and tragedies and remembering the people who have suffered in order to not repeat such mistakes and ease the pain of the victims is a task to be undertaken by everyone across borders. Furthermore, it is also our responsibility to create an environment for the younger generation where people can cooperate without disputes for a better future.

In sheer numbers, we may be overshadowed by the substantial presence of Chinese American and Korean American communities in San Francisco, but please understand that many Japanese people are living in your city as well. As of now, the Comfort Women Memorial and plaque that is presently situated in San Francisco will only cause further disruption amongst communities.

San Francisco is part of America, a country founded by the core principles of liberty and justice where citizens of multiple ethnical backgrounds can peacefully co-exist together. As the American flag of stars and stripes signifies, I humbly wish for impartiality and integrity. To assure better U.S.-Japan relations, I earnestly request that you promptly remove the Comfort Women Memorial and plaque from the City and County of San Francisco’s property without further delay.

7. Conclusion

In February of 2017, I first sent a letter addressed to the previous Mayor requesting for the issue of the Comfort Women Memorial and plaque to be treated with careful consideration. Soon proceeding in March, I followed up with another letter to the previous Mayor to reconsider the plan of establishing the Comfort Women Memorial and plaque on a public space as an expression of the will of the City and County of San Francisco. Later in September, I learned about the establishment of the Comfort Women Memorial and plaque on private property. In response to this occurrence, a letter was delivered

stating that if the Comfort Women Memorial and plaque were to be relocated upon public property as an expression of the will of the City and County of San Francisco, then the City of Osaka would be left with no alternative but to rethink the sister city relationship. Then in October, on the occasion when the San Francisco-Osaka Sister City Association delegation visited Osaka, I reiterated my concerns about this issue and entrusted them with a letter addressed to the previous Mayor.

Moreover, in November, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors unanimously adopted the resolution to accept the Comfort Women Memorial as a gift with provision of artwork maintenance. I candidly requested to the previous Mayor to exercise his veto power. If in the case the resolution had passed, I clearly stated that the City of Osaka would eventually have to discontinue sister city relations.

Furthermore, this issue was raised during a National Diet assembly held in November of 2017. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe stated that “Presenting the Comfort Women Memorial as a gift to the City and County of San Francisco is not only deeply regrettable but it also opposes the views of the Japanese Government.” The Japanese Government urged the previous Mayor of San Francisco to exercise his veto power by November 24, 2017 to overturn the Board of Supervisors’ resolution to accept the Comfort Women Memorial. At this stage, the severity of the issue had already escalated beyond confinement at the inter-city level, bringing the Japanese Government into involvement.

Despite all these actions taken by the Japanese side, the previous Mayor still signed the resolution to accept the Comfort Women Memorial as an expression of the will of the City and County of San Francisco. I found this outcome to be extremely regrettable.

In an attempt to break the deadlock, I made requests to meet in person with the previous Mayor but unfortunately our schedules could not be aligned. By then I realized that we were no longer at the stage of resolving problems through having discussions. Even after experiencing all these occurrences, I sent a letter last July to extend my congratulatory remarks on your inauguration as the new Mayor of San Francisco. I believed with this opportunity that we could engage in dialogues anew towards the removal of the Comfort Women Memorial and plaque from public property as well as support an exchange environment that can continually promote friendly citizen-oriented relations between our cities. However, your current position indicates that the heartfelt intentions of the Osaka citizens, and of myself, could not reach out to you, which is quite unfortunate.

I understand that a sister city relationship is to be built upon a foundation of solid mutual

trust. However, the very relationship of trust between our cities, which was constructed over years of friendly exchanges, has ended up declining significantly due to the aforementioned reasons, the sequence of events that have transpired, and the decision made by the City and County of San Francisco. Hence why, I have arrived at the conclusion that the continuation of sister city relations is no longer possible.

Ever since the sister city affiliation was formed between Osaka and San Francisco in October 7, 1957, cordial relations have been maintained for over 60 years. During this extensive span, many exchanges and friendship events have been fostered, where it has undoubtedly brought about mutual benefits for both cities as well as deepened the mutual understanding between our citizens. With the foundation of grassroots exchange between both cities, I sincerely wished to continue our sister city relationship. It is truly disappointing to terminate sister city relations.

I realize the current situation is definitely a challenging one. But in the future, should the City and County of San Francisco retract the Comfort Women Memorial and plaque from public property, and when an exchange environment is properly intact again to support friendly citizen-oriented exchanges between our cities, please inform us. If these conditions are met, the City of Osaka will be genuinely inclined to fully revive the sister city affiliation whenever necessary.

To conclude, I would like to offer my best wishes to your personal good health, happiness and future success.

Just as previous letters have been, please accept this 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