

Testimony

Won-Ok Gil
Born in Korea, 1928



Won-Ok Gil in August 2017

“When I resisted [rape], the Japanese soldiers beat me. When I cried, they beat me even more.”

Won-Ok Gil was born to a low-income family in Huichon, surrounded by mountains in North Pyongan province, in what is now part of North Korea. In 1940, at age twelve, Won-Ok was tricked into a false job offer at a factory. Thinking she could help her family in poverty, she left her hometown to work. The promised factory, in reality, was a “comfort station” in Harbin, China. From the 1930s to the end of WWII, the Japanese Imperial Armed Forces established and operated a military sexual slavery system for Japanese soldiers in the territories they occupied. Hundreds of thousands of women and girls from throughout Asia were forced into this military sexual slavery system.

She broke her silence in 1998 when in her 70s.

At the 956th Wednesday Demonstration on February 9, 2011, Won-Ok Gil said, “The Japanese embassy [in Seoul] has never responded to us [the Wednesday Demonstration participants] even though we’ve held close to one thousand Wednesday Demonstrations, for nearly two decades, in front of the embassy. It’s because they don’t think of us as humans. Instead, they ignore us as powerless ‘comfort women.’ I hope they can treat us as equally as they treat themselves. They should think about how deep our [victims’] pain must be for us to continue fighting all these years.”

The 1,000th Wednesday Demonstration was held on December 14, 2011. In commemoration, the Korean Council installed the statue *Peace Girl* (also known as *Peace Statue* or “*Comfort Woman*” *Statue*) facing the Japanese embassy in Seoul.

In 2007, she testified at the European Parliament in Belgium, leading to the passage of the resolution “Justice for the ‘Comfort Women.’” A decade later, her childhood dream of becoming a singer came true when she released her album *Gil Won-Ok’s Peace*.

In 2015, Won-Ok Gil wrote a letter to her deceased mom, with whom she had never been able to be reunited because of the Korean War that broke out in 1950. In it, she said, “Mom, I miss you. I endured all that pain while abused as a “comfort woman,” thinking one day I could go back to you. But, I’ve lost my way home. The road back home is blocked. Why is the road back so long? Although I’m a feeble, old woman, I’m not going to give up my fight against the Japanese government. Mom, let’s meet again.”

“Please help make the world without war so that there won’t be any more victims like me.”

Photo credit: Jeong A Lee

Sources: The Korean Council, *The 15th Asian Solidarity Conference for the Issues of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan*, (South Korea, 2018), 4.
Letter to mother by Gil Won-ok, *The Korean Council*, Aug. 12, 2015.
The Korean Council and Seoul Metropolitan Government, “Wednesday is For Peace.” *YouTube* video, 7:12. 2018.
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