

# Testimony

Yong-Soo Lee  
Born in Korea, 1928



Yong-Soo Lee holds ESJF's teacher resource guide, happy to see it. She said, "Thank you for this resource guide. I'm so glad young students will learn about our story and the importance of peace and justice. Thank you for remembering us." (March 2018)

*"I lost myself for a long time. I thought I was worthless. I didn't talk about it, and nobody asked me. Until the [other "comfort"] women came out, I did not exist."*

Yong-Soo Lee's loss of self-identity began in 1944 when she was forcibly taken to a Japanese military base for *Kamikaze* pilots. She was sixteen. Yong-Soo was born to a low-income family in Daegu in North Gyeongsang province in the southern part of Korea.

"The Japanese soldiers tortured and cut me when I resisted rape."

During her two-year imprisonment Yong-Soo suffered a miscarriage and lost her sense of self, becoming a woman who existed solely to meet the sexual needs of her captors.

"It never entered my mind to run away," Yong-Soo said. "I had no idea where I was or what was outside. I didn't have a chance to talk with the other girls. My food was brought to me. I thought I was alone." It was only decades later that

Yong-Soo found other victims and her voice. The Japanese Imperial Armed Forces established and operated "comfort stations" in their occupied territories from the 1930s through the end of WWII in 1945. Hundreds of thousands of women and girls from throughout Asia were forced into Japanese military sexual slavery.

Since 1992, Yong-Soo has traveled throughout Korea and abroad to share the truth of her experience. In 2000, she traveled to Tokyo to testify at the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery. She also testified before a U.S. congressional committee in 2007 in support of House Resolution 121, asking the Japanese government to recognize and apologize for the trauma suffered by the victims of Japanese military sexual slavery. In September 2015, Yong-Soo testified at San Francisco City Hall on behalf of a resolution to install a memorial for Japanese military sex slaves.

When the South Korean and Japanese governments reached a "comfort women" agreement on December 28, 2015 without consulting the survivors, Yong-Soo Lee felt she had been erased again. The following day, she confronted Sunnam Lim, Vice Minister of South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, asking "Why are you trying to kill us [victims] twice?"

**Photo credit:** Education for Social Justice Foundation

**Sources:** ESJF's Interviews with Yong-Soo Lee, San Francisco (2016), Seoul (2017).

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[www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjLqo4T8NXY&t=3s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjLqo4T8NXY&t=3s).