

# SJAM

## Social Justice Alliance for Museums



### Organisation Background

Taipei Women's Rescue Foundation (TWRF) was formally registered in September of 1987 to provide legal consultation and counseling to girls and women in the sex trade, and to help them return to their families and society. The foundation has been a pioneer in the effort to eliminate the trafficking of women in Taiwan and was established with a mission to eradicate child prostitution, which as recently as 1987 was a serious problem, most notably with economically disadvantaged parents selling their daughters into prostitution.

In 1991, the TWRF, together with Awakening Foundation and Rainbow Project, initiated the "Save Child Prostitutes" campaign, which was a landmark in creating awareness of the problems associated with prostitution. With the help of significant media coverage, this campaign brought much attention to the women's movement, which had not hitherto been in the public spotlight.

Since 1992, the foundation has maintained a toll-free hotline to reach out to sex workers seeking assistance. Furthermore, through cooperation with the police, the foundation has helped sex workers to file lawsuits, and provides services such as settlement, medical aid, education, and career counselling.

On the lobbying front, the TWRF has cooperated with legislators and other organizations to help bring modern legislation to Taiwan, including the "Children's Welfare Act" (1989) and the "Youth Sexual Transaction Prevention Act" (1995).

The foundation has been a standard bearer for the plight of aging women who served as sex slaves (so-called "comfort women") to Japanese soldiers during World War II. Since 1992, TWRF has provided legal counsel and psychological support for these victims. We have championed their cause by petitioning governments and courts both in Taiwan and in Japan.

More recently, the plight of female victims of domestic violence has gained much-needed attention, and the TWRF's resources have been extended to battered wives. For victims of domestic violence, we provide legal assistance, counselling, court accompaniment and shelter.

Teen prostitution in Taiwan has for the most part given way to the smuggling of women from across the Taiwan Strait in China to serve as sex workers. Hence the foundation's focus has to a certain extent shifted to providing help to these victims and to coordinating with police and prosecutors to find solutions to the current problem.

TWRF has diversified its mission over its short existence to address the rapid changes that have occurred in Taiwanese society. The foundation's core values, however, have not changed; where there are women in trouble, the TWRF seeks to provide individual assistance and to spur on reform in society as a whole.

## **The Redress Movement and Healing Process of the Former Taiwanese Sex Slaves in the Japanese Military during WWII** Shu-Hua Kang

### **The comfort women system in Taiwan during WWII**

During World War II, Japan waged what it called the “Holy War” to dominate East Asia, the Japanese Government systematically orchestrated its bureaucratic forces—its government officials, armed forces military police, and police—to conscript into “sex service” poor and impoverished women through deception, abduction, and violence. Those women were forced to become military sex slaves, the so-called “comfort women.”

In February 1992, three telegrams at the research library of Japan’s Defense Agency were discovered. The three telegrams detailed the request dated March 12, 1942 for shipping permits from the Japanese Army to enable 50 “comfort personnel” to travel to Sarawak of Borneo. These 50 “comfort personnel” were conscripted by the Japanese military commander in Taiwan at the behest of the Southern Region Headquarters. They proved beyond doubt that in World War II, Taiwanese women were sent to Japan’s frontlines as sex slaves in the military brothels, or the comfort stations. Taipei Women’s Rescue Foundation (TWRP) soon established an appeal hotline for survivors to call, and we started to investigate into the “comfort women” issue.

From research, it was estimated that more than 2,000 Taiwanese women were victims of such crime. However, only 58 survivors from sex slaves contacted TWRP, 46 were Chinese, including 34 Min-Nan people and 12 Hakka people, and the other 12 were aboriginals. They were all from impoverished families that engage in work such as farming, fishing, construction and peddling.

Based on the Chinese victims’ oral history, they aged from 16 to 34 when they were first forced into service. Some were selected through a lottery system while others were recruited deceptively by brokers or local officials. They believed they were going abroad to work as nurses or cafeteria staff, only to be enslaved once they reached the foreign land. Between 1938 and 1945, these women served the Japanese military around Southeast Asia.

As for the other 12 aborigines, 7 of them were from the Taroko tribe, 4 were from the Atayal tribe, and one was from Bunan tribe. They aged from 13-29. Except the Bunan victim was sent to Hong Kong through deception, all were forced to serve Japanese soldiers stationed in Taiwan’s mountainous region. They were forced by the Japanese police to provide labor services, such as cleaning, cooking, and laundry for the Japanese army near by their villages. After working for a period of time, they were raped by the troop. These girls had no way to seek for help. Also, being sexually assaulted by the Japanese soldiers and losing virginity before marriage were deeply shameful to their tribes, and they suffered from that stigma and trauma that continued to affect their dignity, marriage and family relationships.

### **The human rights movement of Taiwanese survivors**

In 1992, Taiwanese government formed a “Special Committee on Taiwanese survivors” through TWRP and legislators’ lobby to support comfort women victims and offered diplomatic and financial support to them. For the Taiwanese survivors and the supporters around the, to request an apology and compensation from the Japanese government was a major goal to achieve.

# SJAM

## Social Justice Alliance for Museums

In 1993 the Kono statement released by Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono after the conclusion of the government study acknowledged that the Japanese Imperial Army had been involved in the establishment of comfort facilities, and the government would consider how to express an apology to the victims. Later, in 1994 the Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama publicly apologized to the comfort women for Japanese atrocities during World War II. However, both the Kono statement and the apology from Tomiichi Murayama had been criticized and denied by the Japanese conservative politicians, and the government refused to offer compensation to the victims.

In 1994, The Japanese government set up the Asian Women's Fund to distribute compensation to comfort women in South Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan, the Netherlands, and Indonesia. However, The Fund called for donations from a wide spectrum of Japanese society, and it was managed by volunteers who were private citizens. Taiwan and South Korea insisted that state redress was what we required, and that the fund could not serve as a replacement. Therefore, in Taiwan, we held a campaign "refusing the Asian women's fund" and requested compensation directly from the Japanese government. Also, Taiwan government provided NT 500,000 (that equals to Yen 2,000,000) for each survivor. TWRF later held a fund raising campaign and received large donation from the society of Taiwan to provide each survivor another NT500, 000. It all reflects the support from Taiwanese government and society to the survivors.

On July 14, 1999, nine Taiwanese victims of sexual slavery filed the lawsuit seeking reparations from the Japanese government in Tokyo's court. The lawsuit demanded official apology and three million New Taiwan Dollars for each victim from the Japanese government. The Tokyo District Court turned down the case in 2002. The appeal was rejected by the Tokyo High Court in 2004. The Tokyo Supreme Court confirmed the rejection of the lawsuit in 2005.

Victimized Asian countries, such as Taiwan, Korea, the Philippines, and China, resorted to law for justice. Subsequent lawsuits were all blocked on grounds of "over the statute of limitation," "sovereign immunity," and "waiver of claim by victims forgoing the reparation rights" by the Supreme Court.



# SJAM

## Social Justice Alliance for Museums

### **The empowering process of the survivors**

In 1992 when TWRP held the first press conference to reveal Japan's wartime atrocity, three survivors chose to testify behind a black curtain. They felt ashamed and were afraid that their families and friends would look down upon them. Behind the sense of shame were the social and cultural contexts that emphasized women's chastity and also these survivors used that same perspective to judge themselves. However, from 1992 to the present, we have witnessed their transformation from victims to survivors, and from survivors to activists. Having participated in therapeutic workshops, international conferences and solidarity events for more than 20 years, these survivors greatly encouraged by survivors from other countries, and international friends who have supported them unconditionally. Although justice has not been served, the survivors no longer hide themselves from the general public. They know it was not their fault and it is the Japanese government which should be shameful. Their families, moved by these survivors' courage and perseverance, have turned to support the survivors wholeheartedly. Family's approval has given the survivors even greater strength to fight for justice.

How have these survivors changed and become empowered during the past 2 decades? TWRP has adopted 3 approaches to help them: trauma recovery, family engagement, and social movement participation.

#### **1. Trauma Recovery**

TWRP has started a series of therapeutic workshops for the survivors since 1996. We invited professional counselors to help the survivors deal with their trauma and negative emotions, through over 70 therapeutic workshops in the past 16 years with a variety of themes. The last series ended in 2012, as the survivors' health condition no longer allowed them to participate. Although the survivors' trauma could not be fully healed through the workshops, they have gained peer support and personal growth to go through past trauma. The development of therapeutic workshops can be divided into 2 phases:

##### **(1) Trauma Healing (1996-2006)**

Since the comfort women issue was just uncovered, the series of workshops were targeted to deal with the effects of trauma that resulted from the experiences of being enslaved through talk, drama, art, and yoga therapies. Through the therapies, the survivors learned to appreciate themselves, release their emotions, and accept the traumatic experiences happened in their lives.

##### **(2) Lifespan Integration (2007-2012)**

In this phase, the survivors were in their late 80s and early 90s, and they were often faced with illness as well as the passing of friends. The series of workshops therefore aimed to prepare them for the final stages of life by discussing their attitude towards life and death, loss and grief, and guiding them through life review to find the beauty and richness of their live, enabling them to acquire peace and integration.

TWRP also encouraged the survivors to learn new skills, such as digital photo shooting during the photography therapy. The pictures they took reflected the survivors' childhood experience, and their perception of themselves before and after being conscripted. The series of workshops in this phase gave the survivors an opportunity to look back on their lives by relating their works to early life experiences.

## 2. Family Engagement

Family members' attitude more or less influences the survivors' willingness to join the comfort women movement. Ahma Chen Tao could never forget what her uncle said to her when she finally came back to Taiwan after the war. He rejected her and destroyed her dignity by saying "the Chen's never has such a despicable woman like you." Some of the survivors never want to bring up their past experience at war with their families, even though it is no longer a secret.

In the beginning TWRF paid more attention on the survivors themselves and the lawsuit against the Japanese government, rather than the survivors' relationship with families. As time went by, we started to involve their family members in the movement and therapeutic workshops. By accompanying the survivors, their families thus have a better understanding on the survivors' irreplaceable role in the movement, and such understanding has made the survivors more confident of their decision to come out.

One survivor's daughter was strongly opposed to her mother's coming out. She thought being a comfort woman was a shame, and talking about it in public would bring disgrace upon the family. Initially, she could not understand why her mother decided to contact TWRF and testify. However, thanks to the invitations from TWRF, she began to accompany her mother to the workshops and got acquainted with other survivors. She gradually understood the purpose of the workshops and the importance of these survivors', including her mother's, testimonies. After this survivor passed away, her daughter still accepts our invitation to solidarity events and international conferences, speaking on behalf of her mother.

## 3. Social Movement Participation

The survivors' activism in the movement has earned them tremendous support from the society. During the past 2 decades, the survivors have participated in international conferences, went into high schools and colleges in Japan to testify, and joined the demonstration every year to demand a formal apology. The survivors have met a lot of people who encouraged and inspired them to become women's rights activists.

In the beginning of the comfort women movement, none of the survivors were willing to show their real faces to the general public. In an international conference held in South Korea, Ahma A-tao requested the media to leave the conference room before she testified. At that time, the Taiwanese survivors hid from public view, unlike the Korean survivors who did not mind being filmed or photographed, after the conference, a Korean survivor approached Ahma A-tao, encouraging her not to hide from the cameras, "you should not have cleared the conference room.

You are not ashamed, but the Japanese government is." Ahma A-tao could not fall asleep that night, pondering on the Korean survivor's words. Since that day, Ahma A-toa has never shied from the camera and became the first survivor who agreed to reveal her identity. Ahma A-tao's decision inspired other survivors, who came to realize their historic importance in the comfort women movement. One by one, the survivors took off their masks and got rid of their aliases.

"I have been thinking about it for a long time. Now I am sure I want to tell younger people about my story; otherwise, it will be forgotten forever." The 90-year old Ahma Lien Hua finally made up her mind in recent years. As the number of Taiwanese survivors decreases to 5, Ahma Lien Hua became the main spokesperson in Taiwan's comfort women movement, and she took on the responsibility with discretion.

# SJAM

## Social Justice Alliance for Museums

### **Our next step: preserving survivors' stories and establish AMA museum**

The survivors' experiences and their transformation are a part of history, which shall not be forgotten with their passing. As the survivors are gradually passing away, we feel it is important to preserve the history for the next generation. Since 2010, TWRF has been collaborating with a documentary filmmaker and a poet to record the final stages of the survivor's lives.

Through the second documentary on the issue of the comfort women "Song of the Reed," and the book "Reasons for Strength" we can see how the survivors walked beyond anger and sorrow, but used their wisdom to reconcile with themselves and the world. At the premiere of "Song of the Reed," Ahma Lien Hua accepted Taiwanese media's interview for the first time in her life, with no fear and hesitation. She declared, "I demand the Japanese government to apologize to the comfort women victims immediately. Our time is running out," She has undoubtedly transformed into an activist, and a women's rights defender. Her growth has been astonishing -- she's hardly recognizable as the woman who once ran away from a press conference for fear that her face would be exposed by the media.

Since 2004, we have been advocating for the need to build a Museum of the Comfort Women and Women's Rights which will act as an important site for the anti-gender-based violence movement. This museum will be designed under the theme of 'Anti-Gender-based Violence' covering comfort women, sexual assault, domestic violence, human trafficking, as well as women in war zones. Currently we are searching for a proper place and hope to launch a campaign to raise fund for this museum.

### **Conclusion**

From the works with the comfort women survivors, TWRF has learned that although it takes time and efforts for victims of violence to recover from past traumas, long-term support from family and the society will accelerate victims' recovery., and that when victims of violence get sufficient support or inner growth, they have the potential to transform into activists, speaking up for themselves. We thus need to examine whether the society as a whole has provided enough support for victims of gender-based violence and whether the resources are allocated to the right place, and whether the government's policies and services are adequate to transform victims into activists.