

## **With Truth and Sincerity:**

### **"We Should Be Born Again As a Genuine Neighbor," President Roh**

The Japanese need to find out the truth about their past, reflect on it and make a genuine apology as well as reparations if need be and then reconcile. This is the universal process for settling historic problems in other parts of the world," said President Roh Moo-hyun.

In his speech marking the 86th Anniversary of the March 1 Independence Movement of 1919, President Roh urged Japan to make a sincere apology and compensate Koreans for its misdeeds during World War II and its colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula.

In a ceremony at the Independence Hall in Chonan, South Chungchong Province, on March 1, 2005, Roh emphasized that such a move was necessary for dealing with the past. "We should be born again as a genuine neighbor by bringing down, with truth and sincerity, the mental wall blocking the two peoples."

"Japan, based on its genuine self-reflection, will take the initiative in removing the deep-seated emotional hurdle between the two neighbors and heal the scar. In this way, Japan that prides itself as an advanced nation will be able to project itself as a conscientious nation as well.

"Otherwise, it will not be able to get out of the yoke of the past. In the same light, however strong it may become in the area of economy and military preparedness, it will be difficult for Japan to earn the trust of its neighbors and become a leading nation in the international community," said Roh.

Touching on the issue of Japanese citizens allegedly abducted by North Korea, President Roh expressed understanding of the Japanese people's anger. "But I call on the Japanese to understand the sufferings of Korean people forced to serve as comfort women and laborers during the colonial period," he said. More than 200,000 Korean women were forced to provide sexual services to Japanese soldiers during World War II, but few have received compensation as Japan refuses to provide any funds, saying that 1965 treaty settled all such disputes.

Some diplomatic observers said that Roh gave a strong message to Japan as it is the first time for him to officially mention the compensation issue.

This year marks the 60th anniversary of South Korea's liberation from 35 years of Japanese colonial rule and the 40th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations between the two countries. But former military conscripts, forced laborers and sex slaves are still suffering from atrocities committed by the Japanese.

President Roh promised that his government will step up efforts to resolve the issue of individual victims' claims to seek indemnity from Japan - a right which a previous administration abandoned in return for economic benefits. "Besides the indemnification issue, the government will get to the bottom of the unrevealed truth and make efforts for the return of the remains of forced laborers," Roh said.

According to documents related to the treaty disclosed on Jan. 17, over 1.03 million Korean people fell victim to forced labor and military service during the colonial period.

As of Feb. 25, the number of wartime victims reported to the Truth Commission on Forced Mobilization Under Japanese Imperialism stood at 39,040. The commission will continue collecting information until June. On Feb. 22, the commission launched investigations into forced mobilization in Iksan, North Cholla Province.

In re-establishing diplomatic ties with Japan in 1965, Korea received US\$800 million in grants and loans, blocking any future demands for compensation by individual South Korean victims. The Park Chung-hee administration only paid some ₩300,000 (then US\$620) to each of the families of 8,552 victims between 1975 and 1977.

The Korea-Japan treaty was the result of behind-the-scenes negotiations between officials who turned a deaf ear to the victims' human rights. We should step up efforts to restore our respect and human rights. In addition, some progress has been made for the repatriation of the remains of Korean victims of World War II who died in Japan but no detailed schedule has yet been drawn up.

"It is hard to understand that the (past) government abandoned individual victims' rights to request compensation. Though belated, my government will strive actively to solve the matter," Roh said.

"There is no change in that I will not make the two countries' past history a diplomatic issue, but this cannot be resolved through South Korea's unilateral efforts," said Roh. He stressed the need for the two nations to become close neighbors in a bid to jointly open a new era in Northeast Asia.