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Some Japanese-Americans fear for 'comfort women' resolution fallout+



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NEW YORK, June 26 (AP) - (Kyodo) As a U.S. House committee passed a resolution Tuesday seeking Japan's apology over the sexual exploitation of Asian women during World War II, some members of the Japanese-Americans community expressed concern for the unpredictable impact such a resolution may have on U.S.-Japan relations.

"We do believe that it is important that (neither) this issue nor any other issue have a negative impact on U.S.-Japan relations," said Irene Hirano, executive director and president of the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles.

Hirano made the remark at a New York meeting Monday between leaders of Japanese-American community and Japanese government missions, including Sen. Daniel Inouye, a Hawaii Democrat, and Japan's Ambassador to the United States Ryozyo Kato. The meeting, fourth of its kind, was launched in 2003.

"We are oftentimes the first to be impacted when there is a negative relationship between our two countries," Hirano said, adding that the incarceration of 120,000 Japanese-Americans during World War II was the "direct impact" of the worsening relations between the two.

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Citing a more recent example, Hirano said the murder of Chinese American Vincent Chin in the early 1980s stemmed from trade frictions between Japan and the United States. Chin, who was mistaken for a Japanese at a Detroit bar, was beaten to death by two white autoworkers frustrated by the declining industry.

"We are very concerned about issues that might negatively impact our relationship because we feel there is a personal and direct impact that we face," Hirano said.

The House Resolution 121 was submitted in January by Rep. Michael Honda, a California Democrat, and some Republicans. It urges the Japanese prime minister to offer an official and unequivocal apology to the victims, known euphemistically in Japan as "comfort women."

Historians say up to 200,000 young women, mostly from Korea but also from China, Indonesia, the Philippines and Taiwan, were forced to work in brothels used by the Japanese military.

The issue grabbed the renewed spotlight earlier this year when Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe voiced doubts about the Japanese military's involvement in coercive recruitment of such women.

Abe later said he will stand by the 1993 statement issued by then Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono that stated that the women were often recruited against their will.

Not all Japanese-American organizations have sided with Tokyo's argument against the passage of the resolution. For example, the Japanese American Citizens League Chicago Chapter adopted a resolution in April formalizing its support for the House resolution.

"I don't think this will significantly impact the Japan-U.S. relations...if anything, it's going to help strengthen them," said Won Kyung Lee, executive director of the Korean American League for Civic Action who has reached out to many Japanese-American organizations in the process of garnering support for the resolution.

Lee said offering unequivocal apology to the aging victims will help improve Japan's relations with its neighbors and will also help increase its standing in the world.

"It's not a personal attack against the Japanese government or the people or Japanese-Americans. I don't think this passage will negatively affect the Japanese-Americans community because we don't look at it as 'us against you.' It's a larger issue...it's more of a global, human rights issue," Lee said.

Now that the committee has voted in favor of the resolution, attention will shift to whether it will be put to a vote on the full floor of the House, with Honda saying the resolution could be voted on possibly in mid-July.

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