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Australian former sex slave welcomes U.S. resolution on comfort women

ADELAIDE, Australia (AP): An Australian woman forced into sex slavery by the Japanese during World War II said Wednesday she is "full of hope" after U.S. lawmakers agreed to endorse moves to urge Tokyo to apologize.

U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee's 39-2 vote late Tuesday in favor of a resolution calling on Japan to formally apologize for its military's use of sex slaves sets up the proposal for consideration by the full House of Representatives.

Jan Ruff O'Herne, an 84-year-old former Dutch colonist born in Java, Indonesia, now living in the southern Australian city of Adelaide, said she hopes Japan will finally apologize for forcing her and thousands of other women to work as sex slaves, also known as comfort women, during World War II.

"This is a step in the right direction," O'Herne said Wednesday. "I'm full of hope. It would be fantastic for the comfort women, late in our lives and after all these years, to get this finalized with an apology."

O'Herne and two South Korean victims traveled to Washington in February to tearfully support the nonbinding resolution urging Japan to "formally acknowledge, apologize and accept historical responsibility in a clear and unequivocal manner" for the women's ordeal.

The vote Tuesday will likely cause unease in Japan, where officials say leaders, including current Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, have repeatedly apologized for the Imperial Japanese Army's coercion of women to work in military brothels.

The lobby group, Friends of Comfort Women in

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Australia, also welcomed the U.S. resolution.

"Now the government of Japan has unprecedented international pressure to right the wrongs of its history," group spokeswoman Anna Song said.

"I hope this activates Australian MPs to show their support, especially ... to Ms. O'Herne," Song added. (**)

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