

House passes motion recognizing 'comfort' women



Four of the many former 'comfort women' spoke to politicians in Ottawa on Tuesday, Nov. 27, 2007.



Ellen van der Ploeg describes her experience in Java when the Japanese occupiers labelled her as a prostitute.

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OTTAWA — Members of all federal parties unanimously passed a motion Wednesday recognizing that Japan used women as sex slaves during the Second World War.

The motion also encourages the Canadian government to press Tokyo to make a "formal and sincere apology" in its legislature to all victims, referred to as comfort women. The women were rounded up from Japan's occupied territories, including China, during the 1930s and '40s.

New Democrat MP Olivia Chow spearheaded the motion, and was backed by the secretary of state for multiculturalism, Jason Kenney. The two hosted a delegation of comfort women on Parliament Hill this week.

"There are over 200,000 women who have been suffering through this kind of torture," Chow said during question period in the House of Commons.

"Four of the survivors of sexual slavery are on Parliament Hill asking us to join them in asking Japan to give a formal sincere apology."

Said Kenney: "We commend them for their courage, their bravery and their dignity considering what terrible things took place. They inspire us all, I hope in all parties, to join together in combating contemporary forms of slavery, sexual servitude and human trafficking."

The declaration ruffled the feathers of Japanese embassy officials, who point out that a senior government official made a historic and public apology in 1993 to women who suffered under the Imperial Forces. A fund was set up by that government in 1995 that dispersed \$20,000 to 285 former comfort

women.

"We're not trying to reject or camouflage the past -- we want people to know what happened over the past 15 years," the official said.

But those previous gestures were overshadowed in March, when Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe denied the government coerced the women into sexual slavery. He later retracted the statement, but since then the U.S. Congress and the lower house of the Dutch legislature have both passed motions calling on Japan to apologize to the women.

The Canadian motion carefully underlines the good relations between Canada and Japan, but says Japan should "abandon any statement which devalues the expression of regret."