

The suit in the Nagasaki District Court by Chung Nam

health-care benefits at Japanese government offices over-

Aug. 6, 1945.

After the war, she returned

five years ago. Because she now has trouble speaking, her

in person so identity can be confirmed.

Recognize us and apologize, ex-wartime sex slave tells Tokyo

By MASAMI ITO

Staff writer

Tokyo should officially recognize the women Japan forced into sexual slavery for the Imperial army in the 1930s and '40s and formally apologize, a South Korean former "comfort woman" demanded Wednesday.

"I have had it with the Japanese government's shrewd ways," Lee Yong Soo said, speaking on a panel with opposition lawmakers who have a bill before the House of Councilors on the wartime sex slave issue.

Lee, 78, was one of the three women who testified for the first time before the U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia in Washington last week, as they debated a bi-

partisan resolution denouncing Japan for having used "comfort women," the term of the day for the enslaved women.

"The Japanese government is always trying to resolve this issue at its own convenience," she said. "They took us and forced us to become comfort women and, even now, they continue to deny the facts."

On an evening in 1944, Japanese soldiers forced their way into 14-year-old Lee's home and dragged her out by the neck. She was taken to Taiwan, where she was forced to have sex with Japanese soldiers.

"Except for the few wrinkles on my face, I have not changed at all since I was turned into a sex slave at the

age of 14. I remained unmarried," Lee said. "I can never forgive the Japanese government."

Masayoshi Nakaniya, a Democratic Party of Japan member of the Upper House who was on the panel, said he was embarrassed that it was not the Japanese government addressing the national issue, but the U.S.

"An apology is between two people," Nakaniya said. "One side must acknowledge the error and apologize from the heart. When the other side truly understands (the sincerity), that is when an apology is complete. I am angry that this is not the case right now in Japan" with the former comfort women.

Since 2001, a nonpartisan group of opposition lawmak-

ers has submitted bills to the Diet several times calling for an official apology and steps to attempt to restore the women's dignity, including compensation.

Most recently, a bill was submitted to the Upper House during last year's ordinary Diet session by the DPJ, the Japanese Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party. It has been carried over into this session.

"The Diet should pass the bill as soon as possible (so the women can) regain their lost honor," said DPJ Upper House member Tomiko Okazaki, also on the panel.

The U.S. resolution was submitted to the House of Representatives at the end of January by Democratic Rep. Mike Honda of California and

several Republicans. It includes a request that the Japanese prime minister give an official apology.

The government "should formally acknowledge, apologize and accept historical responsibility in a clear and unequivocal manner," the resolution says.

Earlier this week, Foreign Minister Taro Aso expressed his displeasure over the resolution, saying it was groundless.

In 1993, then Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono made the first public statement about the sex slaves.

He said, "the former Imperial Japanese Army was directly or indirectly involved in establishing and managing facilities and transporting (the comfort women)."

NATIONAL NEWS BRIEFS

Fertility rate for 2006 looking up

Kyodo News

The nation's fertility rate for 2006 may be over 1.3 as the number of births rose by some 32,000 from the previous year to 1,122,278, according to a preliminary report released by the health ministry Wednesday.

The rate was at a record low of 1.26 in 2005, and its upturn would be the first in six years, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare said.

The natural growth in population — calculated by sub-

