



Statement on the Re-interpretation of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution

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If we want to survive, let there be no more war! It destroys people like me; children, youth, women, everybody.

– Ms Gil Won Ok, 87 years old, one of the last surviving representatives of the Korean “Comfort Women”.

The 1947 Japanese Constitution has been hailed around the world for many decades as a “Peace Constitution”. Article 9 is an apology for the military dominance and aggression of Japan in the 20th century, and the aspiration for a democratic state striving for lasting peace. Indeed, its Article 9 is a forward-looking pacifist clause that prohibits an act of war by the state. According to Article 9, the state renounces war as a sovereign right, rejects settlement of international disputes through the use of force and does not allow for armed forces to wage war.

After World War II, Japanese churches and organizations have worked hard to uphold the “Peace Constitution” in hope that Japan would become a truly peaceful nation. The image of post-war Japan as a peace-loving nation has been a diplomatic asset for decades and its non-military contributions have been received positively in different parts of the world. The peace policy helped Japan to re-develop relationships with neighbouring states, and has also worked to prevent conflicts in the region.

The recent decision by the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his Cabinet to re-interpret Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution in order to allow Japan to exercise collective self-defence with allies goes against this decades-long peace heritage which has been a model for many countries worldwide. We recall recent proposals to develop collective and non-military

cooperative peace and security arrangements in the region, which we affirm as a move in the right direction.

Renunciation of war is the oath by post World War II Japan not to repeat its mistakes. The tragic history of women throughout East Asia who have been forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese military during World War II is one of the constant reminders of the abhorrence of war and its destructive impact on the lives of innocent and vulnerable people. Changing the interpretation of Article 9 can therefore have serious consequences internationally. We look for Japan to provide leadership for stability in Northeast Asia, rather than yielding to pressure from allies and adversaries.

To the eyes of peace-loving Japanese people and churches, this decision to allow the exercise of collective self-defence is perceived as an outrage. It is clearly prohibited by the Japanese Constitution.

The central committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 2–8 July 2014, therefore:

1. ***Expresses*** its grave concern at the direction indicated by the Japanese government's initiative to reinterpret or change article 9 of the constitution, and its impact on regional security, on the positive example provided by this constitutional prohibition, and on efforts towards global peace and non-violence;
2. ***Calls*** on the Japanese government to honour and respect both the letter and the spirit of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution which upholds non-violence as a means to settle disputes;
3. ***Urges*** the government of Japan to live up to its "Peace Constitution" and build non-military collective peace and security agreements with all neighbouring states in Northeast Asia;
4. ***Encourages*** the Japanese government not to surrender to external pressures to change or re-interpret Article 9 of their Constitution;
5. ***Invites*** member churches to accompany the struggles of peace-loving Japanese people and churches in prayer.