

Lawsuit seeks removal of Glendale 'comfort women' statue



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A Glendale resident, along with a Los Angeles resident and a nonprofit group, filed a lawsuit this week asking a federal judge to order the city of Glendale to remove a **controversial statue** in a public park that honors women victimized by the Japanese government during World War II.

The lawsuit is the latest attempt to remove the 1,100-pound statue for so-called comfort women, which was installed in July, **the Glendale News-Press reported**.

Supporters of surviving comfort women say the Japanese military coerced an estimated 80,000 to 200,000 women from Korea, China and other countries to work as prostitutes in military brothels against their will. Three **delegations from Japan have visited** Glendale in recent months requesting its removal.

The plaintiffs who filed the lawsuit in U.S District Court on Thursday, disagree with the international historical understanding of what occurred during World War II and claim, like Japanese politicians have in the past, that the Japanese government was not involved in sexual slavery.

Many former comfort women have publicly shared stories of their coercion, and the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has stated that some comfort women working in brothels overseen by the government were deprived of their freedom.

According to the lawsuit, installing the statue “exceeds the power of Glendale, infringes upon the federal government's power to exclusively conduct the foreign affairs of the United States and violates the supremacy clause of the U.S. Constitution.”

The lawsuit goes on to state that “by installing the public monument, Glendale has taken a position in the contentious and politically sensitive international debate concerning the proper historical truth of the former comfort women.”

Valued at about \$30,000, Glendale's statue in Central Park, which features a woman in Korean dress sitting next to an empty chair, has reawakened an international debate.

Michiko Shiota Gingery, the Glendale resident who brought the lawsuit, said in the court filing that because of the statue she can no longer enjoy Central Park and she suffers “feelings of exclusion, discomfort and anger” due to the bronze monument, which is often surrounded by bouquets of flowers.

The coplaintiffs in the lawsuit are GAHT-US Corp., an organization that actively opposes the recognition of comfort women, and its president, Koichi Mera, a Los Angeles resident who has helped organize the Japanese delegation visits to Glendale.

Phyllis Kim, spokeswoman for the Korean American Forum of California, which helped pay for the statue, said the lawsuit would not deter her organization from spreading awareness about the comfort women issue.

“The root cause of this wasteful dispute is the fact that the government of Japan has never taken the full responsibility for its crimes against humanity,” she said in a statement. “To this day, it is trying to cover up, downplay and justify their past crimes instead of offering an official, sincere apology and sticking to it like [the] Germans did.”

In the 1990s, a former Japanese prime minister sent personal apologies to former comfort women, but supporters want an official apology from the Japanese parliament, known as the Diet.

In general, local governments have jurisdiction over placing memorials in local parks, but the

lawsuit argues that due to its negative influence on foreign relations with Japan, it should be removed.

According to the lawsuit, Glendale also violated its own city code by installing the statue without a city council vote on the language etched onto a plaque that is on the ground next to the monument and tells the history of comfort women.

The city council did vote to approve the statue, but did not publicly review the plaque wording.

City officials said on Friday that they would not comment on the lawsuit until they had reviewed it.

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