

Opponents appeal ruling against removing Glendale comfort women statue



According to a federal judge, Glendale didn't break any laws by erecting this 1,100-pound bronze statue in Central Park in 2013. The memorial honors women coerced into sexual slavery by the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II. (Liz O. Baylen, Los Angeles Times)

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Opponents of the comfort women statue in Glendale have appealed a judge's decision against removing the installation dedicated to women coerced into sexual slavery by Japan during World War II.

U.S. District Judge Percy Anderson ruled in August that the 1,100-pound memorial to the sex slaves, also known as comfort women, placed in Glendale's Central Park in July 2013 did not cause harm to the plaintiffs or break any laws.

But an appeal has now been filed by Michiko Gingery, a Glendale resident and a member of an organization that works to challenge recognition of former comfort women, and Koichi Mera, a Los Angeles resident.

The plaintiffs began protesting the statue before it was built and continue to push for its removal, charging that Glendale infringed upon the federal government's exclusive power to conduct foreign affairs and that the statue made them feel excluded from the park.

City Atty. Mike Garcia said he was disappointed an appeal was filed.

"The case is meritless and the district court's opinion is a well-reasoned analysis," Garcia said in an email. "We will vigorously defend the city's interests on appeal."

William DeClercq, attorney for the plaintiffs, did not return phone calls seeking comment.

In addition to the appeal, the opponents filed a lawsuit in Los Angeles County Superior Court alleging administrative negligence by the City Council and City Manager Scott Ochoa for failing to vote on the language engraved on the plaque next to the memorial.

The memorial has won support from the Korea-Glendale Sister City Assn. and the Korean American Forum of California.

Supporters of recognition for comfort women say that an estimated 80,000 to 200,000 women from Korea, China and other countries were mistreated during World War II and have demanded a written resolution of apology from the Japanese parliament.

An ex-prime minister has apologized to former comfort women and the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs admitted some women working in brothels overseen by the government were deprived of their freedom.

However, some Japanese nationals deny that their country was involved in the sex-slave trade.

An organization dedicated to removal of the statue, GAHT-US Corp., said in a statement that it wants to present a balanced examination of the issue of wartime prostitution.

"GAHT deplores this issue being used to create a negative image of Japan, Japanese citizens and Japanese Americans in order to weaken the U.S.-Japan strategic partnership that has flourished for over 60 years and has been the backbone of the U.S. policy in East Asia," the statement said.

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