
SOUTH KOREA WARNS JAPAN IN ROW OVER WARTIME FORCED LABOUR

07.11.2018

Channel News Asia (7 November 2018)

Japan should avoid aggravating historical tensions in a diplomatic row over South Koreans forced to work for Japanese firms during World War Two, South Korea's foreign ministry has warned.

South Korea's top court ruled last month that Japan's Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal Corp must compensate four South Koreans for their forced labour during the war, which Japan has denounced as "unthinkable."

The binding court verdict is straining relations between the neighbours and could affect bilateral efforts to rein in North Korea's nuclear programme, analysts say.

Japan and South Korea share a bitter history that includes Japan's 1910-45 colonisation of the Korean peninsula and the use of comfort women, Japan's euphemism for girls and women, many of them Korean, forced to work in its wartime brothels.

Japan's Foreign Minister Taro Kono said in a Bloomberg interview on Sunday that "it would be difficult for any country to do anything with the South Korean government" if a court can reverse Seoul's agreements made under international law.

Kono's remarks threatened to add fuel to the controversy, South Korea's foreign ministry said late on Tuesday.

Advertisement

"South Korea is very concerned that Japan's leaders in positions of responsibility are disregarding the root cause of the issue...and continue to make comments that rouse our public's emotions," the ministry said in a statement.

"The Japanese government must be clearly aware that excessive political emphasis on the present case will be of no help to the future-oriented relationship between South Korea and Japan," the ministry added.

The row was triggered by a Supreme Court ruling that Nippon Steel pay 100 million won (US\$87,700) to each of the four steel workers who sought compensation and unpaid wages, saying that their rights to reparation was not terminated by a 1965 treaty.

Japan says the issue had been resolved "completely and finally" by the 1965 agreement.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said on Wednesday South Korea was in violation of

international law after the Supreme Court issued its verdict, and Seoul should take steps to redress the situation immediately.

"We are watching to see what concrete steps the South Korean government will take," Suga said.

A senior official in South Korea's presidential office said on Wednesday the government needed time and Japan's latest comments were not helpful.

"There has been a ruling by the judiciary that differs from the previous government stance, so we have to arrange our stance," said the official, who declined to be named.

"This takes time, and the Japanese government overly criticizing our government does not help resolve the situation," the official added.

South Korea says there were nearly 150,000 victims of wartime forced labour, 5,000 of whom are alive. Japan says the compensation issue was settled by the 1965 treaty normalizing ties.

In December, a South Korean appeals court is expected to rule on a similar case of compensation claims against Mitsubishi Heavy Industries.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/world/south-korea-warns-japan-in-row-over-wartime-forced-labour-10904224>

Kaynak/Source: