
JAPAN, S. KOREA FAR APART OVER WARTIME LABOR AS G-20 MEET NEARS

- 24.05.2019

The Asahi Shimbun (24 May 2019)

The foreign ministers of Japan and South Korea argued over the issue of compensation for wartime laborers and ended their 80-minute meeting in Paris on May 23 no closer to a resolution.

South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-hwa rejected Foreign Minister Taro Kono's request for the establishment of an arbitration panel to settle the dispute.

She called on Japan to be cautious in its words and deeds.

Tensions between the two countries have intensified since the South Korean Supreme Court ordered a number of Japanese companies to pay compensation to South Koreans who worked for them during Japan's 1910-45 colonization of the Korean Peninsula.

The Japanese government argues that all compensation claims for the period before and during World War II were settled under a 1965 bilateral agreement.

Kono requested the arbitration panel, which would consist of one member each from Japan, South Korea and a third nation, as stipulated in the 1965 agreement.

"I strongly requested that South Korea take the responsibility to quickly implement specific measures," Kono told reporters after the meeting.

He said he wanted the administration of South Korean President Moon Jae-in to take action before Moon attends the Group of 20 summit to be held in Osaka on June 28 and 29.

"We cannot allow a situation in which a violation of international law exists with no action taken," Kono said.

According to South Korean government officials, Kang told Kono there was a need for diplomats from the two nations to resolve the issue in a wise manner, and that the two sides should work to relieve the scars and suffering of the victims.

Kono said he told Kang the issue was related to international law, and that priority should not be given to personal emotions.

He said there was a need to expediently correct the international law violation because such laws are the foundation for relations between nations.

(This article was written by Tamiyuki Kihara in Paris and Hajimu Takeda in Seoul.)

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