



General Assembly

Distr.: General
29 August 2022

English only

Human Rights Council

Fifty-first session

12 September–7 October 2022

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Joint written statement* submitted by Japan Society for History Textbook, International Career Support Association, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[8 August 2022]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



The Republic of Korea revisionist historical view on “Sado Gold Mines”

On January 28, 2022, the Japanese Government informed the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) that Japan recommends its “Sado Gold Mine” to be inscribed as World Cultural Heritage. “Sado Gold Mine” is a historical site located in Sadogashima Island in the northern part of Japan and is composed of several gold mines. Sado Gold Mine has a long history and during Japan’s Edo period (from 1603 to 1868), the entire process of gold mining and refinery was carried out by traditional manual manufacturing. In the 17th century, the Mine produced over 400 kilograms of gold per year and its production was at a top level in the world. Today, this historical site has preserved the memory of the superb technical level achieved at the time. As such, the Japanese Government recommended this site as worthy of the status of a World Heritage Site.

However, the government of the Republic of Korea claimed that Sado Gold Mine was the very place where Koreans were forced to engage in labor during World War II and that therefore it is strongly opposed to Japan’s recommendation of the site, demanding that Japan withdraw the recommendation.

Whether Sado Gold Mine would be inscribed as World Heritage site or not is to be decided finally by the World Heritage Committee after the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) fully examines the recommendation. During this period, we anticipate the Republic of Korea Government’s feverish lobbying to prevent Sado Gold Mine from being inscribed.

However, the Republic of Korea Government’s assertion against the prospective inscription is totally untrue. Here, we will point out how absurd and fact-twisting the Korean assertion is.

1. The focus of Japan’s recommendation is the Edo period

Japan’s recommendation deals strictly with the Edo period. It highly evaluates the gold production system of manual manufacturing established during the Edo period, which has been rarely seen in the world. This has nothing to do with the Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea is not a party involved in the issue. Therefore, the Republic of Korea is not in the position to oppose the inscription in question.

Moreover, the Korean assertion that “there was forced labor in the gold mines, which disqualifies the site for World Heritage Site” is wrong in the first place. If the Korean assertion were right, Athens’s “Parthenon” or Rome’s Colosseum would surely be disqualified because both of them were built by slaves.

2. There was no forced abduction

It is true that there were Korean workers in Sado Gold Mine during World War II. However, those Korean workers were not forcibly brought there as the Republic of Korea Government claims. Most of the Korean workers in Sado Gold Mine went to work there of their own volition, looking for high wages. At that time, in order to come to mainland Japan from the Korean Peninsula, various permits were needed. Those who failed to obtain the necessary permits often entered mainland Japan illegally, seeking work for high wages. From 1939 to 1942, 19,200 illegal immigrants were caught and then were forcibly sent back to the Korean Peninsula. If there had been a need to forcibly bring Korean workers, those illegal immigrants caught upon entry would have never been sent back to the Republic of Korea.

3. “Mobilization” of Koreans, who were Japanese nationals at the time, was legal

There were some Korean workers brought from the Korean Peninsula to mainland Japan through “mobilization.” At that time, Japan and the Republic of Korea were one country and

Koreans were Japanese citizens. Therefore, it was legal to mobilize Koreans who were Japanese nationals. The ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No.29) [Japan ratified the Convention before the War] Article 2-2-c) states: “The term forced or compulsory labour shall not include any work or service exacted in case of emergency, that is to say, in the event of war....” Thus, the mobilization of Korean people was authorized by the international law. In April 2021, the Japanese Government decided at a cabinet meeting that the wartime mobilization of Korean workers does not constitute forced labor as stated in the Forced Labour Convention. Prime Minister Kishida Fumio has confirmed it.

4. There was no slave labor

There was no wage system based on ethnic differences applied at Sado Gold Mine. As for payment and treatment, there was no difference between Japanese and Korean workers. A reliable primary source (1) reveals that with wages being paid according to results, many Korean workers earned more money than the Japanese workers did. The Republic of Korea’s assertion that Korean workers were abducted and engaged in forced labor is merely a lie the Republic of Korea made up to denigrate Japan.

As pointed out above, the Republic of Korea’s assertion distorts historical facts and is totally groundless. The Republic of Korea’s aim is to degrade Japan’s past by rewriting history and to hold a diplomatic superiority over Japan. To accomplish this goal, the Republic of Korea is deploying “intelligence warfare,” using the United Nations. If various United Nations organizations involved in the World Heritage Inscription were to make a wrong judgment regarding the case of Sado Gold mine, confused by the unilateral lobbying activities conducted by the Republic of Korea, not only would be Japan’s national honor deeply harmed, but also the United Nations’ credibility would be enormously damaged.

Hereby, we, as Japanese nationals, ardently ask those who are involved in the case of inscription of the World Heritage Sites to duly evaluate the historical value of Sado Gold Mine in a just and impartial manner and inscribe Sado Gold Mine as World Cultural Heritage, and not be influenced by the Republic of Korea’s political propaganda.

Lastly, we submit this statement to the 51th session of the Human Rights Council so that the Human Rights Council and its Members’ Governments may understand that Sado Gold Mine displays valuable achievements and is fully worthy of inclusion in the World Cultural Heritage and that the Japanese people eagerly hope to have it inscribed as a World Cultural Heritage site, while the assertions made against our efforts by the Republic of Korea are totally groundless.

International Research Institute of Controversial Histories, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.

(1) The Japan Mining Industry’s “Survey Report on Korean Laborers”, December 1940.