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South Korea releases first-ever footage of 'comfort women'

SA NEWS

Jan Ruff-O'Herne, 95, still waiting for apology from Japanese Government over

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EVERY time Jan Ruff-O'Herne draws the curtain to her living room, she remembers the horrors of war and the deep wounds of her shocking past resurface.

For 74 years, she has been waiting for an apology from successive Japanese governments – but time is no longer on her side.

The Adelaide great-grandmother and internationally decorated peace activist turned 95 in January this year.

She is the last survivor of a group of seven young women forcibly removed from a prisoner of war camp in February 1944 in Java who were systematically raped by hundreds of Japanese soldiers for several months at a military brothel.

“I still get scared when I close the drapes because getting dark meant getting raped over and over again,” Mrs Ruff-O'Herne said.

“I will never forget the first time and his big, fat, repulsive, horrible face.

“They took away my youth, my innocence, my virginity. And while I have forgiven the Japanese for what they did to me, I can never forget.

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📷 Jan Ruff O'Herne 18 years of age before World War II. Picture: City Pictures



📷 Jan Ruff-O'Herne pictured on Thursday, April 19, 2018. Picture: Russell Millard

“It is a horrid part of World War II history they are trying to conceal – a war crime that cannot be forgotten.

“I don’t want any money; all I want is an apology and, of course, I’ll never get it because they won’t admit their history.”

It is estimated that up to 200,000 women from Korea, China, Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) and the Philippines were prostituted against their will across Japanese-occupied Asia throughout the war for the “comfort” of Japanese soldiers

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Mrs Ruff-O'Herne said she refused to take part in a Japanese Government compensation program for Dutch WWII comfort women victims in 1998, which included a copy of a letter of apology from then-Japanese prime minister Ryutaro Hashimoto to then-Dutch prime minister Willem Kok for those who participated in the \$2.5 million reparation scheme. She has repeatedly criticised the scheme as a half-hearted attempt at silencing victims.

“The apology will never come for me – I’m too old,” she said. “So my (two) daughters will take it over. My story will never die.”

In December 2015, the Japanese Government issued a statement of regret to South Korea’s comfort women and offered \$8.8 million in compensation to ease diplomatic tensions.

Japan was heavily criticised internationally at the time for failing to publicly extend what was labelled a “weakly-worded” apology to all comfort women.

Earlier this week, South Korean President Moon Jae-in announced the 2015 deal was not final and demanded Japan issue an additional apology to the diminishing group of South Korean victims of WWII’s comfort women atrocities.



📷 Jan Ruff O'Herne with Sister Florita, who was interned at same P.O.W. camp by Japanese troops during WW2. Picture: Supplied

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"I applaud the efforts of Mrs Ruff-O'Herne AO and other Australians in ensuring we never forget the horrors of war and the suffering it inflicts upon women in particular."

A Japanese embassy spokesman said successive prime ministers and government officials had expressed remorse to former comfort victims.

"With regards to questions of reparations, return of property, and claims stemming from the last war, these have been legally resolved – including the comfort issue," he said.

"The Government of Japan has taken to heart sincere remorse for the past that so deeply injured the dignity and honour of many women during the war."



📷 Jan Ruff O'Herne, second from right, pictured in Tokyo in 1993 with other "comfort women" from North and South Korea, China and Philippines. Picture: City Pictures

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same title.

“There is a danger that these stories will die with my mother’s generation,” Ms Ruff said.

“But if these war atrocities are told and retold, then there is the hope that younger generations can remember and understand,” she said.

“We won’t give up on this – otherwise people like mum will become ghosts of the past.

“We won’t forget.”



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