

Kajima to compensate Chinese for war labor

¥500 million fund set up for Hanaoka conscripts

EXA "227"
International War Crimes Tribunal

Kajima Corp. on Wednesday agreed to set up a ¥500 million fund to compensate the Chinese victims of a World War II labor camp in Odate, Akita Prefecture, where a major uprising took place toward the end of the war.



SUPPORTER Lin Bo Yao (left) and lawyer Takashi Niimi hold a statement written by eight Chinese plaintiffs in the forced wartime labor case against Kajima Corp., while Kazuo Nakazawa holds a picture of her deceased husband LI Kojin, and lawyer Masatoshi Uchida holds the picture of another victim at the Tokyo High Court on Wednesday. AP-Jiji PHOTO

The agreement is the first compromise on wartime labor reached between a Japanese company and Chinese victims.

Lawyers representing the Chinese group said that Kajima, a major construction firm, and the Chinese group, representing survivors and relatives of the deceased, reached the settlement at the Tokyo High Court, ending a five-year court battle over a ¥60.5 million damages suit filed by 11 plaintiffs.

Kajima's wartime predecessor, Kajima-gumi, operated the Hanaoka labor camp in Odate. Chinese forced laborers staged an uprising as the end of the war neared against cruel working conditions and torture at a nearby copper mine where Kajima-gumi had a contract to conduct a river improvement project, they said.

In the June 20, 1945, uprising, known as the Hanaoka incident, five Japanese mining supervisors were killed. In retaliation, 113 conscripted Chinese laborers were tortured to death.

Of the 998 Chinese workers taken to the mines between

August 1944 and June 1945, 418 are said to have died there by December 1945, including those killed after the riot.

The plaintiffs first demanded a public apology and compensation in December 1989, to which Kajima responded the following year by admitting responsibility, making a public apology and offering ¥50 million for a memorial service. The victims rejected it, however.

In June 1995, a total of 11 Chinese survivors and the next of kin of those who died,

led by 88-year-old Geng Juan, filed a suit with the Tokyo District Court asking for a total of ¥60.5 million in compensation.

They claimed that Kajima was directly responsible, since its present-day success as a major construction firm was built on the sacrifices of Chinese laborers.

The court rejected the claim in December 1997 without hearing testimony from survivors, saying forced labor in Japan had ended in 1948 and the statute of limita-

tions on the case had passed.

This prompted the plaintiffs to challenge the ruling, and in September last year, Judge Masato Niimura recommended in the Tokyo High Court that a settlement be pursued on the grounds that "the incident differed from the norm."

According to the high court-mediated compromise that was reached Wednesday, Kajima Corp. reconfirms a 1990 "joint statement" apologizing to the victims, and will leave

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Chinese plaintiffs near settlement with Kajima over Hanaoka Incident

Chinese plaintiffs suing Kajima Corp. for damages suffered in an incident in Akita Prefecture in 1944 are likely to sign a court-mediated settlement as early as today, sources said Tuesday.

A group of 11 Chinese plaintiffs sued the major construction firm for damages incurred when Chinese workers rebelled against the abuse and harsh working conditions meted out by their captors at a mine in a town that was known as Hanaoka, which is present-day Odate.

The workers had been forcibly brought to Japan before and during World War II.

Five officials, including representatives of the construction firm, were killed in the riot. About 100 Chinese laborers died when the riot was put down by local police, and some 300 more Chinese were tortured and then killed following the incident — known as the Hanaoka Incident.

The plaintiffs, including one Chinese laborer involved in the incident, and relatives of the deceased

suit in 1995 demanding that Kajima pay ¥65 million in compensation.

The Tokyo District Court dismissed the suit in 1997, saying the plaintiffs' rights to demand compensation had expired. But the plaintiffs appealed to the Tokyo High Court.

Judge Masato Niimura of the Tokyo High Court has recommended the plaintiffs and the Kajima reach a compromise. It is not immediately known how much compensation

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