

Remembering two “Comfort Women”

Lola Masing (The Philippines)

Ms. Tomasa “Masing” Dioso Slinog (nickname “Lola¹ Masing”) passed away at age 78 in the presence of her family at a state hospital in Panay, the Philippines, at 2:00 pm on Friday, April 6, 2007.

Lola Masing was the only woman in the country to express her refusal to receive the monetary compensation from The Asian Women’s Fund. Lola once wrote a letter to The Asian Women’s Fund after experiencing justice realized for the first time at The Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan’s Military Sexual Slavery (December 2000, Tokyo). In the letter, she asserted that the monetary compensation from The Asian Women’s Fund would never make up for the violation of her rights as a woman, and that the Japanese government must be held accountable for what its army did to her father and herself. She wrote the letter whilst in poor health and such severe poverty that she could barely feed herself, and she stood firmly by this conviction throughout her life.

Born in Panay, Lola Masing lost her mother immediately after she was born. Lola Masing’s father was killed when he resisted the Japanese army trying to kidnap her. Lola Masing spent the following 2 years under

confinement of the Japanese army, where she was raped and abused day after day. Deprived of her only family and deeply violated by the Japanese army, Lola Masing could not wish to be married and spent the rest of her life single, working as a seamstress.

Lola Masing was the embodiment of love. Lola Masing did not stop giving even when she was cheated. She was fashionable and had a sense of humor that could outwit and surprise people. She was a generous woman with a noble mind, and kind to those who were socially disadvantaged. She raised war orphans as her own family, and fed and had homeless women stay at her home. She embraced her supporters from Japan as her daughters, sons, and grandchildren.

“I am old, physically weak, and too exhausted to fight. I even wish to give up fighting... But I will not withdraw from what I’ve got my foot in. I will continue to fight so that what happened to me will not happen to you,” Lola Masing told supporters from Japan. The legacy of her struggle is to be passed on and continued by those who were touched by her. (Miho Tsuji)



¹ Lola means “grandma” in the Philippines.

Avo Marta (East Timor)

On April 29, 2007, I received a phone call from Ms. Angelina de Araujo (HAK), who had just returned to East Timor after completing a speaking tour in Japan. (The tour was for a campaign to donate exhibition panels displaying the history of women's suffering and struggles under occupation by the Japanese and Indonesian armies. These exhibition panels will be of great value to East Timor which lacks educational materials on history, and where the suffering of people during the Japanese occupation is rarely taught.)



Over the phone, Angelina told me that Ms. Marta Abu Bore, or "Avo¹ Marta," had passed away. On the day of her return to East Timor, Angelina hurried to Ms. Marta's family and confirmed that Avo Marta had passed away around 4:00 am that day in the presence of all her family members, at her son's house in Bobonaro district in the west of East Timor. Avo Marta asked her family to carry on her struggle.

The Struggle of Avo Marta

Along with Ms. Esmeralda Boe, who passed away in February last year, Avo Marta was a forerunner of the activities to investigate the harms of sexual violations by the Japanese army. She also served as a bridge to connect Japan and East Timor. At The Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery, Avo Marta and Esmeralda publicly announced for the first time as Timorese women the fact that they were turned into "comfort women." Asked by the court clerk to speak the full truth upon making testimony, the two women replied, "We did not come to Japan for

sightseeing. We came to speak the truth. What is there for us to do but to speak the truth?" and received huge applause from the audience. Documentary Japan later interviewed the two, interviews which were meant to be broadcast via NHK (National Broadcasting Corporation of Japan)². In August 2001, Avo Marta cooperated and gave testimony for the filming of the onsite investigation at the Marobo "Comfort Women" site, where she once faced cruel violence. In December 2001, Avo Marta and Ms. Esmeralda flew to Hague with the VTR, and received the final decision from the Women's Tribunal.

It was always cold when Avo Marta traveled abroad. In December 2002 when East Timor won its independence, Avo Marta visited Japan again, and had exchanges with a number of young people through lectures at universities and gatherings, various events, and she also had a sightseeing trip to Asakusa. Avo Marta charmed young people with her easygoing personality and her talks on her husband (deceased in the 80's). When she was proposed to, Avo Marta told her husband all that had happened to her. Avo Marta lectured women, "Don't choose a man by his looks." On the topic of domestic violence, she said, "I would not tolerate violence from my husband, though it's alright for me to do this," pretending to punch someone, which made everyone laugh. Her son, Miguel, who was accompanying Avo Marta's visit to Japan, said, "It's really painful to hear about her sad experiences. But this tragedy didn't only happen to my mother. My mother's struggle is the struggle of all Timorese women who have been violated." Later, Avo Marta's sons found Ms. Domingos da Cruz, a witness to the Marobo "Comfort Women" site.

"To think about each other"

We will never forget Avo Marta.

Avo Marta's words received at my home in Tokyo, at her son's house in Bobonaro, at the Marobo "Comfort Women" site, and at her sickbed after she fell ill in May 2005, have always supported the movement. We have been infused with firm anger and determination of Avo Marta.

When Avo Marta faced cruel violation, she was still little and it was before her menstruation began or her breasts grew. "When I had to deal with 10 people, it was so painful that I couldn't even move. It felt as if my vagina and anus became one," she said. "Dealing with soldiers at night, and constructing roads in the day... The kind of labor I had to tolerate was worse than an animal. Why? Animals can sleep at night." She expressed her anger and said, "Japanese men were also born from mothers... How could they have done something so cruel?" Avo Marta was not afraid to see the Foreign Minister, José Ramos-Horta, who was about to visit Japan at that time. She was also not afraid of her experiences being widely known in her own country through the local media.

When I met Avo Marta in August 2006, she could barely move the right half of her body. She needed to be held to defecate. "I am like a baby," she laughed. "Since I am about to die soon, there is only a little time left for the Japanese government to reclaim," she said with a bite of sarcasm. But the truth was that she was trying to continue conversation, using her last energy, for her friends who were visiting from afar. I reported to Avo Marta, "Since the Japanese government is not doing anything, Japanese groups and HAK from East Timor have begun visiting all of the victims on a regular basis." I told her that some souvenirs were brought by those visits to be of some use for Avo's livelihood, and that the visits were supported by donations from ordinary Japanese people. I also told her that the East Timor exhibition at the Women's Active Museum on War and Peace (WAM) had begun in December to last for half a year. I tried to cheer her up by saying that, with this

exhibition, there will be more friends of Avo's. Avo Marta replied, "*Sira hanoin bau. Hau Hanoin sira. Hanoin Malu mak diak.* (I think of them, and they think of me. It is good to think about each other)." After hearing from more than 100 people, we have confirmed 15 victims in East Timor so far. We wish to carry on the connections Avo made, build confidence, and become friends to fight in solidarity. That way I wish to respond to the last words of Avo Marta. (Kiyoko Furusawa, the East Timor Japan Coalition/Tokyo Women's Christian University)

¹ Avo means "grandma" or "grandpa" in Tetung

² The interview was not broadcast. In Japan, the effort for media coverage of the Tribunal encountered a number of obstacles. One such obstacle was the rightwing pressure exerted to change the content of the NHK programs aired in January 2001. The second episode of this series, which was going to focus on the Tribunal, was mostly edited and replaced with new scenes by the NHK staff just a few days before broadcasting. For more information, please see <http://www1.jca.apc.org/vaww-net-japan/english/backlash/mediasabotage.html>