

ALFP e-magazine: *Voices of Asia*

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Gender Issues

Overview

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In December of 2000 women's groups in Japan and their counterparts in Asia came together to host the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery. An important step, the tribunal brought to international attention an issue that had hitherto been silenced. The speaking out of painful and moving stories on the part of the survivors—a time-tested and trusted strategy of women's movements—illuminated both the universal nature of the issue as well as its cultural and social specificity in different contexts. This continued sharing of stories among women in Asia has helped to heal and strengthen their campaigns and build a shared commitment to peace.

Indeed, whether it is mothers in Sri Lanka, or in Manipur in India, or environmental activists in Indonesia, or anti-traffickers in Thailand, or defenders of workers' rights in Malaysia, Asian women have been at the heart of many crucial debates in a rapidly-changing region. Despite this, their histories still remain unknown, their contribution unacknowledged. In claiming these histories, Asian women have pointed to the dangers of normalizing a partial—male—view as universal, and posited a different, inclusive, diverse future in which the binaries of gender and sexuality are replaced by a rainbow coalition of identities working towards a peaceful future.