

**Joint Statement of Concern by Scholars in the US, South Korea, and Japan
Over the Indictment of Former Sociology Professor
at Yonsei University Lew Seok-Choon**

(English)

We hereby declare our grave concerns regarding Professor Lew Seok-Choon's indictment sought by the Western District Prosecution's Office in Seoul. The said prosecution indicted Professor Lew on three separate charges of "defamation by alleging false information" when, in fact, he merely conveyed his thoughts during a university lecture. In his class, Professor Lew opined that "comfort women were half-willingly and half-heartedly" subjected to prostitution under Japan's colonial rule.

Indeed, history concerning comfort women is a politically and academically sensitive topic; and rightly so. Yet, at the same time, we believe it is crucial to examine history from an impartial and balanced standpoint. In that sense, Professor Lew made his remarks to introduce a counter-argument—predicated on an array of evidence—that challenged three decades old conventional knowledge. He offered his perspective on a specific historical event; and he certainly did not intend to coerce students into accepting his position as their own.

We believe that this indictment is a grave disservice to higher education in Korea. The country emerged from the ashes of the Korean War and is now a vibrant liberal democracy with considerable influence in both regional and international affairs. Over the years, its higher education system improved significantly; and today, it attracts students from all over the world. Unfortunately, however, Professor Lew's indictment illustrates how a culture of censorship is gradually permeating through academe, a place where open debate and the free exchange of ideas ought to be cherished. We genuinely believe that academic freedom and speech rights should be firmly protected in colleges and universities.

We are also alarmed by the prosecution's fixation on a narrow set of evidence (Kono Statement, Coomaraswamy Report) to prove their case and the somewhat baffling witness testimony. Notably, one of the complainants and a primary witness called by the prosecution characterized professor Lew's opinion as "not necessarily false, but different from our

(society's standard understanding)." Thus far, the prosecution has failed to adequately specify which individual(s) and or group(s) were defamed by professor Lew's statement.

We fear that if professor Lew is found guilty, his verdict could set a dangerous precedent that endangers free speech rights and academic freedom in Korea. Moreover, we are deeply concerned that the overwhelming personal attacks he is receiving from the public and the media discourage other professors from expressing their views freely.

We strongly hope that this petition demonstrates our support for free speech and the pursuit of academic freedom. Furthermore, we sincerely hope that the court's decision does not undermine and constrict the democratic values stipulated in the Korean Constitution. The suppression of debate, intolerance of opposing opinions, and unwarranted prosecution of scholars will only hinder the further advancement of Korea's higher education.

Therefore, we ask the court to protect the most essential liberal democratic values by exonerating an innocent intellectual defending himself from frivolous accusations. We believe that setting such a precedent could elevate the discourse and encourage an open exchange of ideas in the public realm.

[In case of a divergence of interpretation, the English version is deemed to be authoritative and prevailing]

All the signatories listed in alphabetical order

Institutions and titles are mentioned for purposes of scholarly identification only, not as an institutional endorsement of the merits

Alexander Bukh (Professor, Wellington Victoria University) *Currently based in NZ

Bruce Ackerman (Professor, Yale Law School)

Chizuko Allen (Professor, University of Hawaii at Mānoa)

Deidre McCloskey (Distinguished Professor Emerita, University of Illinois at Chicago)

Donald Baker (Professor, University of British Columbia) *Currently based in Canada

Eric Rasmusen (Professor, Indiana University Bloomington)

Gregory Clark (Professor, University of California Davis)

Ian Buruma (Professor, Bard College)

Jacob Kovalio (Professor, Carleton University) *Currently based in Canada

John Campbell (Professor Emeritus, University of Michigan)

John Coffee Jr. (Professor, Columbia Law School)

Kevin Doak (Professor, Georgetown University)

Lawrence Wilkerson (Former Chief of Staff to U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell)

Michael Robinson (Professor Emeritus, Indiana University)

Nadine Strossen (Professor Emerita, New York Law School)

Noam Chomsky (Professor Emeritus, Massachusetts Institute of Technology)

Robert Tierney (Professor, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign)

Ron Sullivan Jr. (Professor, Harvard Law School)

Shaun O'Dwyer (Professor, Kyushu University) *Currently based in Japan

Sophia Hart (Professor, College of William and Mary)

Steven Lukes (Professor, New York University)

Steven Pinker (Professor, Harvard University)

William Grimes (Professor, Boston University)