

# Statement of Protest against Prime Minister Abe's Visit to the Yasukuni Shrine

Dear Prime Minister Shinzo Abe

We, the Reformed Church in Japan, strongly protest the Prime Minister's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine on December 26th, 2013.

**Firstly, regardless of the logic of justifying such a visit, a prime ministerial visit to the Yasukuni Shrine represents a gross insult to the people of the Asian countries where our nation had committed acts of aggression in the past. It also represents an act that annuls the efforts of reconciliation that our nation have been establishing with them after the war.**

Yasukuni Shrine is a religious institution dedicated to honor the war dead of the years of the Japanese Empire, where leaders of the war of aggression are also enshrined as "deities." Amidst concern about the deteriorating relationship of Japan with China and Korea and escalating strained relations in the East Asian region at present, such a visit to this Shrine by Prime Minister Abe, who places top priority on constitutional revision among his political policies, is inevitably understood to reflect ultra-nationalistic motives and as an action that is intended to justify the intensions of the war of aggression and to glamorize the history of that war. Based on such an understanding, not only those East Asian nations that were victims of the war but also the Allied Powers such as Great Britain and the U.S.A., will inevitably grow suspicious of Japan and revive such issues as comfort women (wartime sex slaves) and the enshrinement of Class-A war criminals at the Yasukuni Shrine.

Indeed, criticism of the visit to the Yasukuni Shrine is raised by China and Korea as well as Great Britain, the U.S.A, Russia, the EU, ASEAN, Jewish organizations, etc. and is growing across the world.

Prime Minister Abe said, "It is not my intention at all to hurt the feelings of the Chinese and Korean people."<sup>\*1</sup> in a statement following the visit on the 26th. However, considering the timing when the people of Asian countries who had suffered major damage through the Japanese invasion are strongly protesting a visit to the Yasukuni Shrine by the Prime Minister of Japan, his forced visit to the shrine apparently represents a gross insult to those people and ruins efforts of reconciliation. Prime Minister Abe's statement that, "It is not my intention at all to hurt..." is not at all accepted by the global community.

Following our defeat in the Asia-Pacific War, the Constitution of Japan was enacted based on much remorse, and it renounced war as stated in Article 9 of the Constitution. Japan has since followed the path of a peaceful nation that pursues reconciliation with neighboring countries. Prime Minister Abe's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine only damages this legacy of reconciliation that has been built up under the system of the Constitution of Japan. We can only conclude that such a visit to the Yasukuni Shrine is a senseless act that only leads to a significant loss of national interest.

**Secondly, a prime ministerial visit to the Yasukuni Shrine, which used to be a religious institution of state-sanctioned Shinto in the past and where the souls of war dead<sup>2</sup> are enshrined, could be an act of trampling on the constitutional principle of separation of religion and politics and also threaten the freedom of religion guaranteed to the Japanese people.**

Yasukuni Shrine has been a religious institution of state-sanctioned Shintoism that was established and maintained to enshrine war dead since the Meiji Restoration era. This shrine is a peculiar religious institution, which even in the present days represents the notion that the former Asia-Pacific War was "a crusade," and where war dead are continued to be recognized as deities.

As is well known, Article 20 Clause 3 of the Constitution of Japan (the principle of separation of religion and politics) was introduced in response to deep remorse over the terrible psychological violence inflicted by the war of aggression led in the name of the religion of state-sanctioned Shinto of the Yasukuni Shrine, which is dedicated to honor the war dead. The people of Japan must be guaranteed freedom of religion, whereby they can believe the religion of their choice without being forced to accept a specific religion such as Shintoism. Therefore, the person who is ultimately responsible for state affairs should faithfully act according to the principle of separation of religion and politics in case of specific religious acts at the Yasukuni Shrine, which is a religious institution. This is in line with the warnings we have repeatedly made in previous protest statements.

Prime Minister Abe said that the purpose of the visit to the Yasukuni Shrine was "to report before the souls of the war dead how my administration has worked for one year and to renew the pledge that Japan must never wage a war again".<sup>3</sup> However, the visit to the Yasukuni Shrine as the Prime Minister, the highest officer in national politics, inevitably is of public significance. Furthermore, Prime Minister Abe has promoted a series of various policies of reinterpretation of the Constitution during this year aiming to establish a nation that is constitutionally capable of engaging in war. This significant gap between the purpose of the visit as explained above and the Prime Minister's hardline political stance provokes great skepticism among people about the true purpose of the visit.

For the aforementioned reasons, we strongly and loudly protest against the visit to the Yasukuni Shrine on December 26, 2013, as well as the series of policies intended to transform Japan into a nation that is capable of engaging in war by the administration of a government that is intent on constitutional revision, that railroads special state secrets protection legislation through the Diet and that alters the system of the Constitution of Japan.

December 30, 2013

Takashi Yoshida

President and Chairman of the General Assembly

Reformed Church in Japan

\*1 Excerpted from:

[http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/96\\_abe/statement/201312/1202986\\_7801.html](http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/96_abe/statement/201312/1202986_7801.html)

\*2 The Japanese word for “souls of war dead” is “Eirei,” which means "souls" of war dead Japanese heroes as expressed by the Shinto religion)

\*3 Excerpted from:

[http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/96\\_abe/statement/201312/1202986\\_7801.html](http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/96_abe/statement/201312/1202986_7801.html))