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NATIONAL CHRISTIAN COUNCIL IN JAPAN

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Standing on the Confession of War Responsibility and Postwar Responsibility, We Call for the End of the Emperor System

—On the Passage of the Revised Imperial House Law by the House of Representatives—

The National Christian Council in Japan (NCCJ), taking this occasion of the passage of the revised Imperial House Law by the House of Representatives, returns to our own history and once again makes clear our position on the emperor system.

1. What Have We Repented Of?

In 1995, marking 50 years since the end of the war, the NCCJ issued a Chairperson's Statement titled "On the Occasion of the '50th Year After the War'" in January, and in May released the "Statement of the National Christian Council in Japan Concerning Japan's War Responsibility and Postwar Responsibility."

In the Chairperson's Statement, we confessed before God and expressed repentance for the sin of the Japanese Christian churches, which had accommodated themselves to the emperor-system state before and during the war, failed to sufficiently reflect on that past even after the war, and were unable to perceive the problematic nature of the emperor system.

In the May NCCJ Statement, we acknowledged the historical fact that Japan had "illegally colonized Korea and Taiwan through wars of aggression," and toward the regions of Asia and the Pacific centered on China had "committed a long series of illegal acts ranging from the dispatch of troops and occupation to full-scale wars of aggression." We confessed that the Christian churches had committed the sin of "frequently condoning, defending, or actively participating in" these illegal acts. We further pointed out that the greatest responsibility for these illegal acts lay with "the Emperor, who alone exercised sovereignty at the time," and that the state of Japan bears legal responsibility for them, and we made clear our own resolve, as those who likewise bear this responsibility, not to obscure it.

These are not matters of past historical research. They are our own historical understanding and our own repentance. We continue to inherit this confession today.

2. Why Do We Question the Emperor System?

After the war, Japan adopted the symbolic emperor system. However, the emperor system itself, which stood at the center of war responsibility, was preserved.

In our May 1995 statement, we analyzed that the illegal acts of colonialism and emperor-system militarism "should rightly have been judged by the peoples of Korea, China, and other parts of Asia and the Pacific, who were their greatest and most direct victims," but that Japan, "by clinging to the preservation of the emperor system and following the Cold War order," abandoned this opportunity of its own accord, and has to this day failed to build genuine relationships of trust with the peoples of Asia and the Pacific.

Thirty years later, the situation remains unchanged. Assertions justifying colonial rule have not ceased, and postwar responsibilities—including the issue of the Japanese military "comfort women" or "sexual slaves"—remain unfulfilled. We believe this reality is the consequence of having maintained the emperor system even after the war, and of society as a whole having failed to reexamine its responsibility for colonialism and wars of aggression.

At the time of the 1995 statements, the continued existence of the emperor system itself was not a live political issue. But now, when the revision of the Imperial House Law raises the question of whether to maintain the emperor system into the future, if we stand on the historical understanding and repentance expressed in the two 1995 statements, we cannot support institutional reforms aimed at preserving the emperor system. What lies on the extension of that historical understanding is not the preservation of the emperor system, but the call for its end.



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3. The Emperor System Is a System That Ranks Human Beings

The current debate over the revision of the Imperial House Law has proceeded as an institutional discussion concerning the method of imperial succession. But what we are questioning is not the method of succession—it is the emperor system itself.

The emperor system is a system that makes certain persons special by virtue of birth and lineage, and that ranks human beings as superior or inferior. At its foundation lies the idea that a person's standing is determined by their "birth."

The emperor system does not merely institutionalize the highest possible status; by its very nature it also produces, as its counterpart, the lowest status. The long persistence of Buraku discrimination in Japanese society cannot be considered apart from this hierarchical order.

Furthermore, the idea that reveres an "unbroken imperial line" (*bansei ikkei*) as a special bloodline has also been linked to a way of thinking that divides people into "true Japanese" and "those who are not." This has been deeply connected to ways of thinking that have supported colonialism, wars of aggression, and xenophobia, and that have demanded loyalty to the state.

Moreover, the principle of male-line succession reproduces a patriarchal order in which "men inherit the household, and women bear and raise male children." This has denied human diversity—not only in terms of sex, but also sexual orientation, gender identity, and forms of family—and has imposed a "desirable way of life" upon people.

The reason the NCCJ has engaged with Buraku discrimination, the Yasukuni Shrine issue, reconciliation and peace in East Asia, the human rights of foreign residents in Japan, gender justice, discrimination against "persons with disabilities," demilitarization, and nuclear issues is not because these are separate, unrelated concerns. It is precisely because they are different facets of confronting a form of society that distinguishes and ranks people according to birth, lineage, ethnicity, sex, and disability, dividing them into the "desirable" and the "undesirable."

4. The Path We Will Take

Human beings do not exist for the sake of the state. The state exists to protect the dignity of each individual person. We therefore do not call for institutional reform premised on an ideology that ranks human beings as superior or inferior, but call for bringing an end to that ideology and to the institution itself. We do not seek the path of preserving the emperor system through revision of the Imperial House Law, but the path of ending the emperor system itself.

God created all people as equally precious beings—that is, in the "image of God." Standing on this faith, we aim for an equal and coexisting society in which everyone can live with dignity. To this end, we return to the 1995 Chairperson's Statement and NCCJ Statement, and, inheriting the historical understanding and repentance expressed therein, we will continue to question the ideology and institutions that rank human beings as superior or inferior.

July 13, 2026

Rev. Yoshitaka Kano, Chairperson

Rev. Kaori Oshima, General Secretary