

日本カトリック司教協議会

CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF JAPAN



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Reflecting on the Death of Bishop Franciscus Hubertus SCHRAVEN cm and His Fellow Martyrs

On October 9, 1937, 37 years from now, a horrible martyrdom took place when a Japanese troop invaded the town of Chengtingfu, currently called Zhending, located 260 km south of Beijing. A large number of Chinese women and girls took refuge in convents, escaping from the persecution by the Japanese troop. In receipt of this notice, the Japanese army demanded that out of over 5000 Chinese women and girls there, 200 be extradited as sex slaves. Bishop Schraven, who was in the position of protecting the fleeing civilians, told the Japanese troop firmly, "You can kill me, but I never give you what you ask for!"

As the result, when the bishop and his fellow missionaries gathered in a dining room around 7 o'clock at night of October 9, 1937, Japanese soldiers broke into the room and captured them. Then they were burnt in a cruel way.

Who on earth has the authority to make innocent women and girls of the occupied country become the targets of sexual abuse? Such extremely inhumane behaviors arise, when persons with power over others do not know even basic matters such as what fundamental human rights, human dignity and each person's identity are. After these shameful cruelties and killings occurred, the Japanese government ordered its army not to kill European missionaries. However, the government has not made a just apology or compensation until now for the issue of comfort women of the Japanese army in some countries.

Bishop Schraven, who devoted his life to protect the women's dignity, is a precious example of the good shepherd who lays down his life to protect his sheep. He reminds me of the parable in the 9 to 11 verses of Chapter 10 of the Gospel of St. John. It is essential for people in the modern world to have a proper understanding on fundamental human rights and human dignity. Based on this understanding, we should control our behaviors towards others.

I, as a member of the Catholic Church in Japan, extend my sincere apology to people in the Netherlands for this incident in China and other various unsettled misconducts by Japanese in our history. We would like to make every effort to promote our friendship in the future as well. I would like to offer my prayer for promoting the beatification of Bishop Schraven as well as other missionaries and faithful from the Netherlands, France, Poland, Croatia and Slovakia who were killed by Japanese army during the same period.

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