

Japan Steelmaker To Pay Wartime Compensation

The Associated Press

TOKYO, Aug. 18 (Kyodo) — Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal Corp. will comply if South Korea's Supreme Court upholds a ruling ordering the Japanese firm to pay 400 million won, or around 35 million yen, to four former South Korean workers as reparation for wartime forced labor, company sources said Sunday.

The Seoul High Court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs July 10 in the first judgment by a South Korean court ordering a Japanese firm to pay compensation in a case involving postwar reparations. The firm lodged an appeal.

However, if the Supreme Court upholds the ruling, "We, as a global company, can't help but accept it," one of the sources said, indicating concern that failure to comply could lead to seizure of the firm's assets in South Korea.

Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal will not accept mediation before the Supreme Court's decision, arguing individuals lost the right to demand compensation under a 1965 treaty establishing diplomatic relations between the two nations.

In the July ruling, the high court said the company committed "crimes against humanity" by joining hands with the Japanese government to mobilize forced labor for the sake of pursuing a war of aggression and "illegal" colonization of the Korean Peninsula.

The four plaintiffs say they were forced to work at a steel mill belonging to Japan Iron & Steel Co., which was later known as Nippon Steel Corp. until it merged with another steelmaker last year to form Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal.

On the ruling, Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said, "Our stance is that the issue of compensation rights between Japan and South Korea has been solved completely and finally" under the 1965 treaty.

In a similar move, the Busan High Court on July 30 ordered Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd. to pay 80 million won each in compensation to five Koreans who were forced to work for the company during Japan's colonial rule.

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