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China Rejects Japan Apology

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TOKYO -- Japan sent mixed signals Friday to China, offering a "heartfelt apology" for its World War II aggressions to try to repair tattered ties - but blunting that message when Japanese lawmakers visited a war shrine critics say glorifies Tokyo's militaristic past.

A Chinese official welcomed the apology but added that "what's of much more importance is the action. You have to make it a reality."

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Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's expression of "deep remorse" at a summit of Asian and African leaders in Indonesia's capital broke no new ground.

But the rare appeal was a clear attempt to reverse the worst erosion of ties between Tokyo and Beijing since diplomatic relations were established in 1972.

"In the past, Japan through its colonial rule and aggression caused tremendous damage and suffering for the people of many countries, particularly those of Asian nations," Koizumi said at the opening ceremony for the summit in Jakarta, conveying Tokyo's "deep remorse and heartfelt apology" for its conquests.

"Japan squarely faces these facts of history in a spirit of humility," he said.

Koizumi's choice of showing contrition at an international forum overseas put him squarely before many former victims of Japan's atrocities, which include mass sex slavery and germ warfare.

It also marked the first statement of remorse from a Japanese leader since



1 Trick of a
a tiny belly:

Cut down
a bit of
your belly
every day
by simply
using this
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old tip...



1995 and the first outside of Japan since Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu apologized for wartime brutalities in Singapore in 1991.

However, Koizumi's remarks were a far cry from what many Asian nations have long clamored for: a strongly worded official statement of apology endorsed by Parliament.

Rhetoric alone appears unlikely to smooth over Tokyo's rift with Beijing.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Kong Quan said "60 years of history has caused great harm to China and Asia."

"That ... Koizumi expressed this attitude in this arena is welcome. We welcome it," Kong told reporters at a summit of Asian and African leaders in Jakarta. "But to express it is one aspect. What's of much more importance is the action. You have to make it a reality."

He said Japan had to do more to "face up to history."

Relations between Japan and China have sunk to their lowest point in decades, aggravated by anti-Japan protests in China in recent weeks as well as disputes over the U.N. Security Council, natural gas resources in disputed seas and new Japanese textbooks that critics say minimize Japan's wartime offenses.

"Mr. Koizumi is bringing out an old apology that has been repeated many times over the past 10 years, every time Japan had to repair diplomatic relations with Asian neighbors," said Shinichi Arai, professor emeritus at Surugadai University. "The problem is that only the words were repeated, but Japan has never done anything to prove it really regretted its past."

Beijing also has objected to Koizumi's annual visits to Yasukuni shrine, which honors Japan's 2.5 million war dead - including convicted war criminals who ordered Tokyo's brutal invasion of Asia in the first half of the 20th century. A monument of Japan's indigenous Shinto religion, it was also used to fan nationalism and emperor worship.

The shrine's symbolism came into sharp focus on Friday: Just hours before Koizumi's speech, dozens of Parliament members made a pilgrimage to Yasukuni.

Koizumi said he hopes to hold a one-on-one meeting with Chinese President Hu Jintao in Jakarta on Saturday, Kyodo news agency reported. But China says it's still considering the proposal.

Even if the two leaders meet, Japan's militaristic past appears likely to remain an impediment to its relations with the rest of Asia.

This week a Tokyo court rejected a suit for apology and compensation by survivors and relatives of victims of Japan's biological warfare and the 1937-38 Rape of Nanking, ruling that the statute of limitations had expired. Historians generally agree imperial soldiers killed 150,000 people in the Chinese city.

Tokyo's oft-stated policy is that claims of compensation have already been settled by agreements establishing diplomatic relations with its neighbors.

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