

‘Memory of the World’ to change rules after Asian controversies

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UNESCO will change the rules of its Memory of the World program to prevent politically motivated applications, a move that reflects Tokyo’s protest over the 2015 registration of records of the Nanking Massacre.

The regulations revamp was confirmed in a unanimous vote at an executive committee meeting in Paris on Oct. 18, a source close to the Japanese government told The Asahi Shimbun.

Memory of the World designation by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization aims to preserve and pass on documentary heritage of historic events and incidents.

The new rules will suspend the screening process of an application if two or more parties involved in the “memory” dispute the facts or recognition of history.

UNESCO will encourage dialogue between the parties and resume the review only when they have found middle ground.

According to the source, the committee voted to include words demanding the director-general of UNESCO take action to avoid political tension rising in relation to the Memory of the World program.

The details of the new rules will be finalized prior to another executive committee meeting scheduled for next spring, and they will be applied to applications submitted from thereafter.

A review for prospective Memory of the World entries will be held in late October, which is scheduled to include a review of the application by citizens' groups from Japan, China and South Korea for registration of testimonies of former “comfort women” who were forced to provide sex to Japanese soldiers before and during World War II.

Regarding the registration of records of the Nanking Massacre as a Memory of the World, Tokyo complained to UNESCO, “the application was made based on China’s one-sided claims, and the authenticity (of records and data) is questionable.”

Tokyo and Beijing both dispute the number of Chinese killed by Japanese troops in Nanking, now called Nanjing, in late 1937 and 1938.

The Japanese government temporarily withheld payment of Japan’s share to UNESCO, and demanded improvement of the rules to prevent the program from being politically exploited.
