

Japan: Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Taro Aso retracts remark on “learning from the Nazis”

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After facing criticism both at home and abroad, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Taro Aso on Thursday retracted his remark suggesting Japan should learn from the Nazis when it comes to revising the Constitution, saying it has led to a “misunderstanding.”

“It’s very regrettable that my remark on the Nazi administration caused misunderstanding,” Aso told reporters.

He said it was inappropriate to cite the Nazis’ techniques as an example and that he was retracting the remark.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga meanwhile emphasized that the Cabinet of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe “never have any affirmative opinions on the Nazi administration.”

Aso stressed that in the speech in which he made the Nazi reference he also drove home the point that any debate on revising the Constitution should be held in a quiet environment.

Aso was quoted as saying Monday during the speech in Tokyo that “the Weimar Constitution was changed almost before people realized it. Why don’t we learn from that method?”

In the same speech, Aso also reportedly said that “the Constitution should be revised based on public opinions that carefully examine the situation. . . . I don’t want (people) to discuss revising the Constitution in a frenzy.”

The Simon Wiesenthal Center, a major international Jewish human rights organization based in Los Angeles, strongly criticized Aso’s remark in a statement published Wednesday on its website.

“What ‘techniques’ from the Nazis’ governance are worth learning – how to stealthily cripple democracy?” Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, asks in the press release. “Has Vice Prime Minister Aso forgotten that Nazi Germany’s ascendancy to power quickly brought the world to the abyss and engulfed humanity in the untold horrors of World War II?”

The center urged Aso to “clarify” his remark on the Nazis.

On Tuesday, South Korean Foreign Ministry spokesman Cho Tai-young blasted Aso, saying that “such remarks definitely hurt many people.”

Reiji Yoshida, *Japan Times* Staff Writer, August 1, 2013

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<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/08/01/national/aso-retracts-remark-on-learning-from-the-nazis/#.UgrTKNgSrc>