

Solidarity Statement

April 25, 2010
Network for Okinawa

We, the members of the Network for Okinawa, represent many hundreds of thousands of Americans and people around the world who support democracy and environmental protection in Okinawa. Our grassroots network draws together representatives from U.S. and international peace groups, environmental organizations, faith-based organizations, academia, and think tanks.

Today we proudly announce our stand with the governor, the mayors, the media, the Henoko village elders, and the one million citizens of Okinawa; the thirty thousand residents of Tokunoshima, and the hundreds of thousands of citizens across Japan who support Okinawa. From across the Pacific Ocean, we support their demand for the closure of the Futenma U.S. Marine Base and opposition to any new military base construction in Okinawa and Tokunoshima Island.

We appeal to Prime Minister Hatoyama to keep his promise to the Okinawan people and honor their rejection of any new construction in Camp Schwab. This includes a proposal to build a runway within the base already rejected in the 1990's. The mayor of Nago, Inamine Susumu reiterated this rejection this year. We also ask Prime Minister Hatoyama to reject the U.S.-Japan 2006 proposal to construct partially offshore runways. This expansion would destroy the coral reef which is the home to the Okinawan dugong, blue coral, and other species, It would damage beautiful Yanbaru Forest, home of many beautiful animals and plants, including endangered species.

We call upon President Obama, as the commander-in-chief of the U.S. military, to honor the Okinawan democratic decision to remove the U.S. Futenma Marine base out of their prefecture and their call for no further U.S. military base construction.

The U.S. military built its first military bases during the Battle of Okinawa to serve as a platform for an invasion into Japan, then ruled by an imperial militarist wartime regime. Over two hundred thousand Okinawan civilians, American soldiers, and Japanese soldiers died in the crossfire between the U.S. and Japan in that battle. It was the bloodiest in the Pacific War.

But the war's end did not bring peace to Okinawa. The U.S. never dismantled its military bases and began to use them under its own Cold War military regime with a never-ending succession of enemies: Korea, Vietnam, Laos, China and the Soviet Union. Some U.S. and Japanese officials again imagine China a threat—despite détente and ever-increasing economic integration between China and the U.S., Japan, South Korea, Australia, and other nations that deems war very unlikely.

Former Okinawan governor Masahide Ota stated—that for Okinawans—the war never ended. Many Okinawans still experience anxiety and depression from wartime trauma. The remains of 4,000-5,000 dead Okinawans have yet to be collected. Unexploded bombs remain throughout the island. Over 5,000 Okinawans have been the victims of crimes committed by American soldiers. Mr. Ota, therefore, asks: “Why shall we start preparing for a new war, while the old war is not over yet?”

Network member Peter Galvin, Conservation Director of the Center for Biological Diversity states, “Destroying the environmental and social well-being of an area, even in the name of 'national or global security,' is itself like actively waging warfare against nature and human communities.”

The US government has repeatedly promised reform in Okinawa. The 1972 “reversion” of Okinawa from the U.S. to Japan did not result in promised demilitarization. Their latest proposal—first made in 1996 and renegotiated in 2006—does not “lighten a burden.” It instead would move U.S. military pollution, noise, and assaults from Ginowan City to untouched Henoko.

How many elections, resolutions, and mass-scale rallies does the Japanese government and US government need before they hear the message of the Okinawan people?

We, the many people in the U.S. and worldwide, of the Network for Okinawa—hear and support these messages for removal, not relocation of military bases from Okinawa.

To illustrate, we would like to share some individual remarks from our supporters:

Gavan McCormack, Australian National University professor states, “An alliance that treats the opinion of Okinawans with such contempt is not an alliance of or for democracy. The ‘free world’ used to be fiercely critical of Moscow for trampling on the opinions of Poles, Czechs, and Hungarians; now, in the name of ‘freedom,’ it is about to act in precisely the same way. Does freedom mean so little to those who pretend they defend it?”

John Lindsay-Poland, Director of Fellowship of Reconciliation’s Latin America program, states: “Military bases in Japan and other countries are material projections of the will of the U.S. to use war and violent force. War is not only brutal, unjust, and ecologically devastating, but unnecessary to achieve legitimate aims.”

Kyle Kajihira, Program Director, American Friends Service Committee - Hawai'i Area Office, states: “The powerful Okinawan demand is clear: peace is a human right. The Okinawan people are an inspiration to our own movement. We stand with them in solidarity for peace across the Pacific.”

In a speech she gave in Stockholm, Japanese Canadian author Joy Kogawa paid tribute to Okinawa's peace-loving traditional culture that honors the sanctity of life:

"There is a certain small island in the east, where the world's longest living and intensely peaceable people live.

"My brother, a retired Episcopalian priest, was in Okinawa for a few years in the 1990's. He told me that in 1815, Captain Basil Hall of the British navy steamed into Naha, Okinawa and was amazed at what he found. The story goes, that on his way back to England, he dropped in to the island of St. Helena and had a chat with Napoleon.

"'I have been to an island of peace,' the captain reported. 'The island has no soldiers and no weapons.'

"'No weapons? Oh, but there must be a few swords around,' Napoleon remarked.

"'No. Even the swords have been embargoed by the king.'

"Napoleon, we're told, was astonished. 'No soldiers, no weapons, no swords! It must be heaven.'

"A unique culture of peace had developed in one tiny part of our warring planet...

"When Japan, that once warring nation, took over the kingdom, there was an entirely bloodless coup. No soldiers were found to help later with the invasion of Korea. A disobedient people, Japan concluded. A kingdom without soldiers was clearly impossible. Okinawa, with its history of peace, must surely have had a culture as close to heaven as this planet has managed. And perhaps therefore a special target for the forces of hate."

Today our world stands at a crossroads between survival and self-destruction. We must transform from a world dominated by a culture of war into a world led by cooperation and nonviolent conflict resolution. Instead of forcing more unwanted military violence upon this peaceful island, the U.S. and Japan would be wise to model Okinawa's democratic culture of life.

<http://closethebase.org/>

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