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**Laudation to  
All Okinawa Coalition Against New Construction of Henoko Base  
By Joseph Gerson  
at the Seán MacBride Peace Prize Ceremony  
Barcelona, November 24 2017**

It is a privilege to be introducing Suzuyo Takazato and Hiroshi Ashitomi who will receive the MacBride Peace Prize on behalf of the All Okinawa Coalition Against a New Military Base. But as a U.S. American, whose country has tormented the Okinawan people with more than seven decades of military colonization introducing them is an exceptionally humbling honor. The steadfast and successful Okinawan opposition to the construction of a new mega air, sea and land base at Henoko for more than twenty years, and the seven decades of resistance to military occupation provide us with an inspiring model of what the fusion of compassion, vision and nonviolence can achieve. Our hope is that the award will help Okinawans, Japanese and the wider world understand that the Okinawan resistance is not alone, and that we are committed to act in solidarity with their righteous peace and freedom struggle in ways that they think best.

We are privileged to award the All Okinawa Coalition the MacBride Prize for its unflagging commitment to win the closure of the Futenma Marine Air Base, which is widely seen as one of the world's most dangerous military bases, and for its unremitting nonviolent opposition to the construction of a massive new air, land and sea base in Henoko. As IPB Co-President Lisa Clark and I observed during our brief visit in Okinawa this past August, the Coalition has assembled all Okinawan forces – grassroots, political, cultural, and intellectual – opposed to these bases, building on decades of democratic and nonviolent struggle for peace and opposing the social, environmental, political violations that accompany foreign military bases, never giving up.

The Coalition's steadfastness and exceptional range of nonviolent actions, the broad popular support it enjoys, and the spirit and dedication that characterize this exceptional anti-bases movement make it a model for peace and justice struggles and deserving of support and solidarity.

Let me put the Okinawan Coalition's struggle in context. Okinawa was long an island nation, the Ryukyu kingdom, with its own remarkable culture, including a distinct language, music, architecture and spiritual practices. During the centuries of Japan's self-imposed isolation, like Nagasaki, Okinawa served the Japanese elite as a window that allowed it to track developments in the wider world. In 1879, Japan conquered and annexed Okinawa. In Tokyo's brutal campaign to erase Okinawan identity, Okinawans were forbidden to speak their native language and even forced to take Japanese names. As recently as two decades ago, Okinawan students were punished for speaking their language.

Okinawa was largely spared the sacrifices and suffering of Japan's Fifteen Year War. But, to buy time to negotiate for the preservation of Japan's Emperor System, but in 1944 the prefecture was transformed into military bastion to slow the advancing Americans. The battle of Okinawa began with a massive "typhoon of steel" shelling that is now legendary. The Japanese military, as well as U.S. forces, slaughtered 150,000 Okinawans – one quarter of the Okinawan people.

Following the conquest, surviving Okinawans were herded into concentration camps. Japan's military Okinawan bases were occupied, with still more of people's property seized to expand the bases and to create new ones. The prefecture was transformed into an unsinkable aircraft carrier for U.S. containment of Japan, the Soviet Union, and soon the People's Republic of China.

In the negotiations to end of the formal U.S. military occupation of Japan, Tokyo again sacrificed the Okinawan people, this time with an agreement that reduced number of U.S. military bases across Japan, while concentrating the greatest number of bases in Okinawa, which remained under formal and repressive U.S. military occupation for another generation. It took two more decades of intense, and largely nonviolent resistance to win reversion to Japan in 1972. In addition its roles in enforcing Cold War containment, Okinawa continued to serve as a training area and launching pad for wars and military interventions in Vietnam, the Philippines and even the Middle East, as well as U.S. preparations for nuclear war.

With Washington's and Tokyo's collusion, the military occupation has endured, with 27,000 troops on thirty-two military bases now still formally occupying just under 20% of Okinawa's land area, as well control of ports and air space. The last U.S. Consul General in Okinawa, described all of Okinawa as a U.S. military base, and insisted that Okinawans who refuse to accept Washington's and Tokyo's world view are "irrational. Such is imperial arrogance.

The cost for Okinawans? Continued occupation and destruction of their lands and property, thousands of criminal attacks, including murder, kidnapping, rape and sexual harassment for which U.S. warriors were not, until recently, held accountable. It's much the same for military accidents that have claimed Okinawan lives – most recently last week. Constant low altitude and night landing exercises terrorize people in their homes, make it impossible for students and teachers to concentrate, and leave many people with sleepless nights. The Okinawan environment has been also been attacked, with everything from a leaking agent orange storage site to a nuclear weapon being lost in Okinawan waters. And as Suzuyo Takazato taught me years ago, even Okinawan's extraordinarily long-life expectancy has been sacrificed by the cultural imperialism of the U.S. fast foods that accompany the U.S. bases.

For years Okinawans have called for the closure of the Futenma base, which is located in the center of Ginowan City, and which has been properly described as the world's most dangerous airbase. In 1996, following the massive Okinawan protests that shook the foundations of the U.S.-Japan military alliance in response to the horrendous kidnapping and rape of a 12-year school girl by three U.S. Marines, Washington and Tokyo moved to pacify Okinawan public opinion by agreeing that Futenma could be moved, with its functions greatly expanded, to a less settled area abutting the Schwab Marine base further to the north. But only after the new base is constructed.

Of course, there would be a heavy cost: the loss of valued fishing waters; worse, the destruction of a unique marine environment, its corals, manatees and other sea life; and the transfer of Futenma's abuses and usurpations to the people of Nago City and its surroundings, Okinawa's second most populated district.

Resistance began almost immediately when octogenarians inspired popular opposition to the construction of the new base by beginning what has become a nearly 5,000 day sit-in on the beach to prevent construction.

The Okinawa Coalition Against the Construction of a New Base have devoted their energies to resisting the base construction with nonviolent demonstrations and barricades at Camp Schwab's main gates and more dangerously in Oura Bay's waters, by launching legal cases in the Japanese and U.S. courts, and by repeatedly electing an anti-base mayor of Henoko, an anti-bases prefectural assembly, an anti-base governor, and an overwhelmingly anti-base delegation to the Diet, Japan's parliament.

I was impressed and privileged in August to witness the reach and commitment of the Coalition when it brought together 45,000 people for a rally in the searing heat. For more than 20 years, this grassroots movement and the people they have elected to press their demands have successfully resisted Washington and Tokyo's machinations, attempts to

buy local elections, to intimidate elected officials, and to repress the people's movement for peace and justice.

In closing, let me briefly introduce Suzuyo Takazato and Hiroshi Ashitomi. I have been privileged to know and to occasionally work with Suzuyo since the 1980s. She is the Co-Chair of the All Okinawa Coalition and Co-Chair of Okinawan Women Act against Military Violence. She was radicalized by her experience of working with prostitutes and ex-prostitutes who "served the sexual needs of Japanese and later American soldiers. The sorrow of these women convinced her that 'military prostitution is the end of a chain of violence created by systems of control: the war system, the patriarchal system, and the imperial system.

She was elected an assembly member at Naha City Assembly, Okinawa for 15 years (4 terms from 1989 to 2004). She is currently the representative of REICO (Rape Emergency Intervention Counseling (founded in 1995), Okinawa representative of the International Women's Network Against Militarism, and Co-Convener of Okinawa Peace Citizens Liaison Council. She is also the author of "Women of Okinawa - Bases, Military Forces and is the recipient of many awards.

I have learned from Hiroshi Ashitomi over the years at the World Conference against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs and other venues. Ashitomi-san joined the founding of the One-tsubo Anti-War Landowners Association in 1982. In 1997, he joined the founding of the Nago No-Heliport Citizens' Association and in 1998, he became the Co-Chair of the Council to Oppose Helipad Construction, working to stop the construction of a new base offshore Henoko. In 2009, he became the president of the plaintiffs' association of the "Lawsuit on the Illegal Environmental Assessment on Henoko".