



IPB  
Marienstr. 19-20  
10117 Berlin, Germany  
Tel.: +49 (0)30 12084549  
info@ipb-office.berlin  
www.ipb.org

---

**Speech of Suzuyo Takazato  
At the Seán MacBride Peace Prize Ceremony  
Barcelona, November 24 2017**

It is such an honor to be awarded Seán MacBride Peace Prize 2017. All Okinawa Coalition to Prevent Construction of a New Base in Henoko is a peace movement officially started 3 years ago. The origin of this movement goes back to citizens' action in 1997 to oppose the US military build-up in Henoko in Okinawa. Our movement brought about a prefectural governor and National Diet members who clearly oppose the military build-up in Henoko, brought together citizens, labour unions and local businesses, beyond political views of conservatives and progressives. We, citizens in the movement who are even in their 70s and 80s, have continued non-violent sit-ins in Henoko, facing riot police violence. The award is a deep encouragement and power for us to go on.

Let me explain why we have protested for so many years.

Okinawa consists of 160 small islands, 40 of which are inhabited. We are located in the semi-tropical climate zone, and the southern most part of Japan. The land area of Okinawa is 0.6 % of the entire land area of Japan. The population is 1.4 million, little more than 1 % of the population of Japan. The northern part of the main island of Okinawa called Yambaru, meaning mountainous area, is known for the bio-diversity with many rare endemic species.

For over 4 centuries, we were independent Kingdom of the Ryukyus with its own language, culture and history until 1879. The Ryukyu Kingdom managed independence with its own diplomatic and trade relations with China during those centuries even after the Satsuma Clan of Japan invaded the Kingdom by military force in 1609. However, in 1879, Japan annexed the Ryukyu Kingdom by force and turned the Kingdom into Okinawa, a part of the modern state of Japan under the Emperor system. We call the annexation "Ryukyu Disposal." After the annexation, assimilation policies were imposed, including prohibition of our language. Since then, we have gone through many difficulties.

Towards the end of the World War II, Okinawa was sacrificed to save the Emperor on the mainland Japan. When the direct combat started on our island, the Japanese Imperial Army tried to keep US military on our land as long as possible to save time. The battle lasted for 3 months. One fourth of the residents were killed. After the end of the battle in 1945, the US military took control over the island, putting the people in relocation camps for a few years. Meantime, they confiscated our lands, homes and farms to build military bases. In 1950s too, the US military expropriated the lands by "bayonets and bulldozers" and built more military bases.

When Japan went independent from the post WWII Allied Forces occupation in 1952,

Okinawa was left under US military direct occupation. They wanted Okinawa as their important military outposts in the Far East. Under the US military occupation, we had to live for another 20 years without basic human rights until the reversion to Japanese administration in 1972. During those years, we always protested against the oppressive US military occupation.

But the reversion in 1972 did not liberate Okinawa. The US and Japanese governments made a secret deal to continue to use Okinawa as the military post. Our hope to enjoy the Peace Constitution of Japan when reverted was betrayed. We had hoped for withdrawal of the US military from Okinawa, but it did not happen. Our sufferings have continued to this day.

70.6% of the US military facilities exclusively used by the US military in Japan is located in Okinawa. The US military bases occupy 15% of the Okinawa main island. The damages caused by the US military have been a part of our daily life.

Kadena Air Force Base and Futenma Air Station of the Marine Corps have caused severe noise problem by touch-and-go practices or heavy transport helicopter operation. Residents in the areas exposed to the severe noise have suffered hearing problems, insomnia, and other health problems. Children's development is even more seriously affected. There are class actions brought to the court. But even the Supreme court of Japan acknowledged the damage, they did not rule the suspension of the military activities because the US-Japan Security Treaty has higher priority than legal decisions.

The cases of the damages and violence by the US military presence include fatal accidents by US military vehicles, fighter jet crash into an elementary school in 1959 or heavy transport helicopter crash on a university campus in 2004. These are only a few among many others.

On the lands that have been returned from the US military, toxic materials such as cadmium, mercury or PCB have been found above the safety levels. But because of the unequal US-Japan Status of Forces Agreement, these contamination problems cannot be examined by the local authorities, and the US military is not held responsible for clean-up.

Violence against women and girls and the violation of their human rights by the US military personnel have continued since 1945. This history shows that the function of the US military bases in Okinawa is directly connected to the wars waged by the United States for the past 72 years. Last year in April, a 20-year-old woman was raped and killed by a former marine, who dumped the body. People of Okinawa again called for withdrawal of all the bases from Okinawa.

The 1995 gang rape of a girl by three soldiers, in fact, led to the new build-up plan in Henoko. We were once again outraged by this crime and stood up against the US military stationing. 85,000 citizens gathered at the rally. To ease our rage, in 1996, the two governments established Special Action Committee on Okinawa to decrease the burden on Okinawa. SACO announced 1) relocating Futenma Air Station that sits in the midst of densely populated area to another location in Okinawa, and 2) return of the half of the Northern Training Area in Yambaru.

It turned out these did not decrease the burden, rather, they strengthened the military capability. About half of the Northern Training Area was finally returned last December, but US military built 6 more Osprey pads on the remaining area in Takae. To forcefully proceed with the Osprey Pads construction, the Japanese government sent 1000 riot police from the mainland Japan to suppress our non-violent protest action of a few hundred people. The construction already destroyed the Yambaru forest. MV22 Osprey operation have created severe noise problem and children are exposed to them. Osprey already caused offshore crash accident flown over residential area last December.

Relocating Futenma Air Station proved to be more burden, too. The residents of Nago city where Henoko is located expressed their "no" to the plan in referendum held in 1997. All Okinawa movement has its origin here. More people joined the protest action even "sit-in-on-the-sea" in 2004. The government had to halt construction plan in 2005. But they came back with modified plan to move the site from offshore to Henokosaki, a few months later.

Nago city now has a mayor who denies any base on the sea or the land.

On November 13, the new US Ambassador to Japan, William Hagerty visited Okinawa and met with the governor. The governor told the Ambassador that the new build-up in Okinawa in return for the relocation of Futenma Air Station is discrimination against Okinawan people. The



governor also told the ambassador that the US government and the US military are responsible for this situation, that the world is watching the protest action and seeing elderlies, grandmas and grandpas, exposed to violence in order for the construction to proceed. The governor emphasized the importance of democracy in both Japan and the United States that are at stake in the forceful military build-up in Henoko.

We hope the award will help more people in the world to know about Okinawa, more people to challenge US Japan military alliance, and bring international cooperation to stop the construction in Henoko, achieve peace and justice to overcome militarism, violence and discrimination. We are determined to continue efforts.