

International Meeting
2019 World Conference against A & H Bombs

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I am Toguchi Osamu, head of the Japanese Communist Party Group in the Okinawa Prefectural Assembly. I also work as secretary of the All-Okinawa Council. I sincerely thank all of you, dear chairpersons and delegates from all over Japan and the world, for your support for Okinawans' struggles.

Thank you for allowing me to speak for the second time at this International Meeting, as I already spoke here in 2017. For the last two years, even in adverse conditions, our struggle has been making steady progress. I will focus on this in my speech today.

It has been 74 years since the Battle of Okinawa and 47 years since Okinawa's return to Japan. However, our prefecture which accounts for only 0.6 percent of Japan's total land area, is still made to host 70.4 percent of all U.S. military facilities in Japan. Okinawans continue to suffer from accidents, crimes committed by U.S. soldiers and all other incidents that occur because of the presence of U.S. bases. Although it is officially claimed that the nuclear weapons were removed from Okinawa on its return to Japan, a secret agreement between Japan and the U.S. still allows the U.S. to bring them back into Okinawa in the event of emergency.

The Japanese government is now conducting landfill work in one of the world's richest and most precious seas at Henoko in Nago City, mobilizing riot police to remove the protesters sitting in by force. It aims at building a new base capable of serving for 200 years that will be offered to the U.S. for military use.

There is no other country in the world that dares to deny the will of its people, to deny democracy, human rights, and local autonomy, and to oppress its own citizens in order to build a base for the free use by foreign troops.

The Abe administration can no longer claim that Japan is democratically governed. What it is doing in Okinawa is no different than the actions taken by a high-handed dictatorial government.

However, the more the government attacks Okinawans to force them to give up, the more united they become to continue fighting. Their struggle is now expanding widely in Japan and the world.

Regarding the abolition of nuclear weapons, the Okinawa Prefectural Assembly on July 6 of last year unanimously adopted a statement calling on the Japanese government to officially nullify the bilateral secret nuclear agreement; maintain the Three Non-Nuclear Principles; firmly refuse the redeployment of nuclear weapons in Okinawa; conduct an investigation into the situation regarding ammunition depots in Henoko and Kadena, and support, sign and ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

In November 2017, the All-Okinawa Council received the Seán MacBride Peace Prize from the International Peace Bureau. This distinction has given tremendous courage and bright prospects to Okinawans who have been fighting for a long time. I would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation to the IPB president and the people concerned.

Right before this World Conference, IPB Co-President Reiner Braun visited Okinawa, observed the sites of struggle and interacted with the residents. At a symposium held a few days ago, he said, "Okinawa is not isolated, [that] the People of Okinawa can win a victory if they fight [together] with people around the world, [and that the] IPB would like to invite the All-Okinawa Council to become [a] member." I was so touched and encouraged by these words that my body trembled with resolve. We are proud to be able to fight with the IPB. Thank you very much.

On July 31, 2018, former Okinawa Governor Onaga Takeshi's tenacious approaches bore fruit when the National Governors' Association, representing governors of all 47 prefectures, unanimously adopted a resolution urging the Japanese government to apply domestic laws to the U.S. forces and to drastically revise the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement to that end. This was a landmark event realized for the first time in Japanese political history. At its general meeting this year, the association confirmed that it will continue to work on this issue. Former Governor Onaga's life-risking struggle, Governor Tamaki Denny's steadfast efforts and Okinawans' fight have moved the National Governors' Association to take such a clear position.

To our regret, Governor Onaga Takeshi suddenly passed away on August 8, 2018. However, residents of Okinawa have overcome their sorrow and keep fighting unyieldingly.

In the gubernatorial election on September 30, we won the victory of Tamaki Denny, Onaga's heir, with the largest number of votes ever.

I am the head of the general planning committee of the Okinawa Prefectural Assembly. In late January, the committee visited Germany and Italy to investigate the status of force agreements these countries concluded with the U.S. forces. In Italy, we had a meeting with a former commander of the NATO Fifth Air Force.

First, it was sobering for me to see the huge difference between these countries and Japan, in terms of the actual status of U.S. bases, emphasizing the aberrant situation in Japan. Second, while these two European countries are striving to preserve their sovereignty, the Japanese government remains so abnormally subordinated to the U.S. that we felt ashamed of being Japanese citizens. Third, conversely, I realized that we can change the status of Okinawa and Japan if the Japanese government resolutely faces the U.S. to defend Japan's sovereignty.

In Italy, a former prime minister and a former military commander expressed their outrage by saying that U.S. bases in Okinawa are "so aberrant" that it is impossible to imagine such bases in any other part of the world. They said that the problem is the Japanese government which has left the issue for a long time since the end of World War II. At the same time, they encouraged us by telling us that they believed the situation in Okinawa could change if we stood up with reason.

Last February, a prefectural referendum was held directly asking residents if they supported or opposed the landfill work for the construction of a new U.S. base in Henoko. The result shows that an enormous majority of 72% of voters were opposed to the landfill work.

All-Okinawa candidates won two successive overwhelming victories in the House of Representatives by-election in the 3rd Okinawa district in April and the House of Councilors election in July. We will continue to demonstrate Okinawans' collective will at every occasion.

The House of Councilors election in July was an epoch-making event for Okinawans' struggle. Opposition parties were able to jointly support their united candidates in all 32 single-seat constituencies throughout Japan. As a result, 10 of them got elected. In their jointly agreed policy, opposition parties for the first time took up an Okinawa-related agenda including cancellation of the construction of a U.S. base in Henoko and an immediate halt to operation of the Futenma base and its closure and return. This was a major historic step

showing that the All-Okinawa struggle is expanding to become an All-Japan struggle.

To bring together the struggles of Okinawans and other Japanese citizens in order to force the Abe administration to step down is the shortest path to dismantle the Futenma base and scrap the Henoko base construction plan. This is also a way to advance towards a bright future for Okinawa and the rest of Japan. Let us take steps forward along this path.

Friends, our struggle is directed against the Japanese and U.S. governments and thus it is accompanied by very difficult challenges. However, reason and justice rest with us. We are never isolated. Our struggle is steadily expanding in Japan and the world. We will never give up. Let us fight together to win a victory. The future is in our hands.