

Solidarity with Okinawa and Removal of Foreign Military Bases
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My name is Senaga Kazuo, secretary general of the Okinawa United Action Liaison Council against Japan-U.S. Security Treaty (Toitsuren). I will report on our struggles to remove U.S. military bases from Okinawa.

Okinawa was once the Ryukyu Kingdom that flourished through maritime trade. However, it was invaded by the Satsuma domain in 1609 and became a vassal state. Then in 1879, it became Okinawa Prefecture when it was annexed by the Meiji government. People in Okinawa actively accepted the government's imperial and militaristic education in order to be recognized as "subjects of the Empire of Japan" and not as those colonized by the Satsuma domain. The teaching that "the greatest honor is to die for the nation" led to the tragedy of the battle of Okinawa.

During the Battle of Okinawa, one out of every four residents lost their lives. Japanese soldiers deployed to Okinawa were not allowed to surrender even in the face of the U.S. military's overwhelming capability since their mission was to buy time for Japan to prepare for a battle on the mainland. They had to follow an order to fight until the last soldier had died, an order which increased casualties among residents. The war was so horrific that U.S. servicemen called it "the battle ground gathering all hells on earth."

Due to the militaristic education forcing residents not to become prisoners of the enemy, mass suicides took place in many places, where people killed their family members by their own hand. Others threw themselves off cliffs because they had no place to escape. Teenagers' lives were also taken. Male students of junior high schools and teachers' training schools were mobilized to serve in the "Student Corps of Iron and Blood for the Emperor", and their female schoolmates had to work for the military as nursing assistants.

Japanese soldiers were also a threat to residents. They killed Okinawans whom they considered to be spies. They drove out and took the food of residents who had escaped the U.S. forces' artillery fire and were hiding in gama (natural cave) and shelters. They killed crying babies. From such barbaric acts of Japanese soldiers, Okinawans learned that the military would never protect residents. They have expressed their determination to never repeat the tragedy of the Battle of

Okinawa in the phrase “Nuchidu Takara (life is a treasure)” and have maintained their strong belief that life is the most important thing.

Following its victory in the battle, the U.S. military requisitioned the Japanese military's bases in Okinawa and expanded them. By forcibly taking residents' land in violation of international law and building airports and seaports, the U.S. turned Okinawa into an island of bases. In the 1952 San Francisco Peace Treaty, Okinawa forcibly became a colony of the U.S. military in exchange for the restoration of Japan's sovereignty.

Under the U.S. military occupation, the Government of the Ryukyu Islands run by Ryukyu people was established, but the U.S. military placed the U.S. Civil Administration of the Ryukyu Islands (USCAR) above it. Everything was decided with an order by the high commissioner, the head of the USCAR. Of course, Ryukyu people's human rights were denied. U.S. servicemen continued to commit murders and rapes. Even if they were arrested and prosecuted, they went back to the U.S. without any charge. There was a high commissioner who said, “Autonomy in Okinawa is a myth.”

The U.S. brought chemical weapons into and deployed missiles carrying nuclear weapons in Okinawa. Aiming to further expand bases in Okinawa, the USCAR planned to turn the Ryukyu Islands into a permanent base. However, the power of the people, who waged land struggles covering the entire islands, pushed back the plan. This developed into a movement for Okinawa's return to Japan. Ironically, the driving force of their struggle was “democracy” taught by the U.S. Women's suffrage was achieved, and local autonomy by elected mayors and assembly members was established. However, the contradiction between equality under “democracy” and the U.S. military rule became the driving force of the Okinawan people's movement to return to Japan with its pacifist Constitution.

Although residents wished for a “peaceful Okinawa without nuclear weapons and bases,” the 1972 “nuclear-free and mainland-level status” reversion to Japan left large U.S. bases and the damage they caused in Okinawa. Next year will mark the 50th anniversary since Okinawa's return to Japan, but U.S. nuclear facilities and units remain in Okinawa, and 70% of all U.S. military facilities in Japan are concentrated in Okinawa. Crimes and accidents caused by U.S. military personnel and military aircraft crashes have been repeated. Contamination caused by PFOS and other contaminants is serious. COVID-19 infections among U.S. military personnel are considered as one of the causes of the explosive growth in infections in Okinawa. Okinawa, where the damage caused by the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty and the Status of Forces Agreement is concentrated, is now about to be turned into a main battlefield for the next war due to the U.S. strategy against China.

The Japanese government's policy to “reduce bases” in Okinawa, indicated at the time of

Okinawa's return to Japan, was changed to "relocate bases within Okinawa" under the SACO (Special Action Committee on Okinawa) agreement. This means that U.S. bases in Okinawa will be maintained forever. The first step is to relocate the U.S. Futenma Base to Henoko in Nago City, and the construction for the relocation continues today. However, when the construction will be completed is uncertain due to the soft sea bed in Oura Bay. There is no vessel to carry out the work and no precedent for improving soft sea bed as deep as 90 meters. The Okinawa Defense Bureau says that it will take at least 12 years to complete the construction. But according to experts, it is a reckless plan with a high risk that the structure will collapse during the construction work. That is why some think tanks in the U.S. are questioning the possibility of the construction. The Japanese and U.S. government's plan to build a new base in Henoko and to turn Okinawa into a permanent base is now completely stuck.

The governor of Okinawa is expected to make a decision within this month on an application for a design change in the Henoko landfill work submitted to Okinawa by the Defense Bureau. Of course, Governor Denny Tamaki will disapprove the application. The All Okinawa Coalition plans to hold a rally to support the governor's decision and calls on other areas throughout Japan to organize rallies to express their solidarity with Okinawa. I hope to see such rallies held in many areas around the world.

Under the Suga administration, which is pushed into a difficult situation, the dignity of the war dead is about to be infringed for the landfill work in Henoko, due to a plan to use soil mixed with their remains in the southern part of Okinawa's main island. That is where a fierce battle took place during the Battle of Okinawa. With the enactment of the land-use restriction law, struggles for the removal of military bases are about to be punished.

However, Okinawa residents continue to fight persistently. We know the power of democracy. We know the power of solidarity. We believe that by the power of solidarity with people inside and outside Japan calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons and removal of military bases, we can push the Japanese and U.S. governments to achieve an Okinawa without nuclear weapons or military bases. In order to realize a petition proposed by Okinawan leaders, to block the Henoko base construction, and to drastically revise the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement, we will work hard for the victory of candidates backed by the All Okinawa Coalition in the upcoming general election and the Nago mayoral election. I would like to ask for your continued support.