

The World is Watching: International Scholars, Artists, and Activists Petition to Prevent a New U.S. Military Base in Okinawa

International Scholars, Artists, and Activists Petition. World Eyes on Okinawa

By [Steve Rabson](#)

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Introduction by Steve Rabson

In Okinawa after three U.S. servicemen raped a 12-year-old school girl in 1995, the U.S. and Japanese governments sought to tamp down boiling outrage by promising to close a dangerous and noisy U.S. Marine airbase located in the center of densely populated Ginowan City. But there was a catch. The base would not close until completion of a new base at another location in the prefecture, Henoko in Nago City. Okinawans resoundingly rejected this plan, vigorously opposing it in local and prefectural elections, referenda, and in sustained public protests. For two decades they have stymied the governments of two powerful nations determined to force the base on them.

In addition to government intimidation, arrests, and violent attacks by Japanese riot police and coast guard patrols, Okinawans have also faced betrayals by their own elected officials. Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama, elected in 2009, received strong voter support in Okinawa for his promise to move the airbase out of the prefecture, only to capitulate under pressure from the U.S. and his own government a year later, acceding to its construction in Okinawa. Hirokazu Nakaima, governor 2006-2014, had supported the base, but in the days leading up to the election of November 2010, he started to call for its relocation outside of Okinawa in a bid to win re-election. Then, in December 2013, he abruptly caved in to pressure from Tokyo and signed the landfill permit to allow its construction. His broken promise became the central issue in the gubernatorial campaign of November 2014. Nakaima lost this election in a landslide to current governor Takeshi Onaga who had also changed from a previously pro-base to an anti-base position. During the election and since taking office, he has repeatedly pledged to “do everything in my power” to prevent its construction.

Governor Onaga has been in office for eight months. His most important action on the base to date has been appointment of a committee of environmental and legal experts to reassess procedures followed in filing the landfill permit. The committee’s report, filed in July, concluded that the landfill permit approved by former Governor Nakaima violates Japan’s Public Waters Reclamation Law by failing to “sufficiently take into account environmental preservation and disaster prevention” and by failing to meet the criteria for “appropriate and rational use of national land.” In short the landfill permit was legally flawed. The report was sufficiently damning that the Japanese government issued a one-month moratorium on base construction and entered negotiations with the Governor.

- York at Binghamton
6. Adam Broinowski, Japanese historical and cultural studies, Australian National University
 7. Daniel Broudy, Professor & Chair, Graduate School of Intercultural Communication, Okinawa Christian University
 8. Alexander Brown, PhD Student, School of Humanities and Social Inquiry, University of Wollongong
 9. Michael K. Bourdaghs, Professor, University of Chicago
 10. Akiko Utu Cacaji, Veterans For Peace, Washington DC Chapter
 11. Jenny Chan, China Studies & Sociology, School of Interdisciplinary Area Studies, University of Oxford
 12. John Chappell, Professor of History, Webster University
 13. Choi Sung-Hee, coordinator, Gangjeong village international team, Jeju Island, Korea
 14. Noam Chomsky, Professor Emeritus of Linguistics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
 15. C. Anne Claus, Assistant Professor of Anthropology, American University
 16. Sam Coleman, Veterans for Peace, California State University, Long Beach
 17. Millie Creighton, Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia
 18. Bruce Cumings, Swift Distinguished Professor, History Department, University of Chicago
 19. Kelly Dietz, Assistant Professor, Department of Politics, Ithaca College
 20. Mark Driscoll, Associate Professor of East Asian Studies at the Univ. of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
 21. Alexis Dudden, Professor of History, University of Connecticut
 22. Mark Ealey, Translator
 23. Daniel Ellsberg, Former State and Defense Department official
 24. Cynthia Enloe, Research Professor, Clark University
 25. Thomas Fazi, Writer and filmmaker (Italy), co-director of *Standing Army*
 26. John Feffer, Foreign Policy in Focus
 27. Norma Field, Professor Emerita, University of Chicago
 28. Max Paul Friedman, Professor of History, American University
 29. James Fujii, Associate Professor, University of California, Irvine
 30. Takashi Fujitani, Professor of History, University of Toronto
 31. Bruce K. Gagnon, Coordinator, Global Network Against Weapons & Nuclear Power in Space
 32. Johan Galtung, dr hc mult Professor of Peace studies, Founder Transcend

Steve Rabson is Professor Emeritus, Brown University and an Asia-Pacific Journal Contributing Editor. His latest book is *The Okinawan Diaspora in Japan: Crossing the Borders Within*, University of Hawaii Press.

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