

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

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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 nationsdetermined to force the base on them.

In addition to government intimidation, arrests, and violent attacks by Japanese riot police and coast guard patrols, Okinawanshave 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 probase 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.

In January 2014 a group of over one hundred scholars, artists and peace advocates from the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Europe issued a Statement opposing the plan to construct a new base at Henoko and demanding the swift return of the existing Marine Air Station at Futenma. Again in January 2015, a smaller group, 15 scholars and activists, wrote to Governor Onaga in the name of "No New Bases in Okinawa! Global Voices" urging the Governor to take early action to cancel the license to reclaim Oura Bay for base construction purposes. Now, August 2015, a group of 109 international scholars and peace activists has urged Governor Onaga to honor his commitment to the people of Okinawa. Their statement has received considerable attention in the Okinawan media. See the reports in the following:

Ryukyu Shimpo, August 31, 2015.

Kyodo News, August 31, 2015.

The world is waiting for Governor Onaga to act on the recommendations of the committee.

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August 29, 2015 [[[[[]]]][[[]][[[]]][[]]

The Okinawan people for twenty consecutive years have made plain their overwhelming opposition to a proposed new U.S. Marine airbase at Henoko, on Oura Bay in the city of Nago. Since our January 2014 statement opposing construction of the planned base, local opposition has grown and intensified. People have rallied by the thousands and repeatedly picketed government offices in Okinawa and on the Japanese mainland. The sit-in tent at the

Henoko fishing port is now in its 12th year, and the protest tent at the gate to the planned construction site, which has been a 24/7 action since January 2015, has continued for more than 400 days. Protesters are engaging in non-violent civil disobedience – using sea kayaks on the bay and blocking trucks with their bodies on the land – physically interfering with the construction process. Riot police and members of the Coast Guard have attacked demonstrators, causing serious injuries. Polls in the prefecture record 80% opposition to the base. For their part, the Japanese and US governments remain adamant in their determination to thwart the will of the Okinawan people.

The island prefecture of Okinawa, comprising 0.6 % of the nation's land area and 1% of its population, already bears 74% of U.S. military bases in all of Japan. This burden represents close to 500 times that of the rest of the country. Okinawans understand this as blatant structural discrimination.

Government officials in Tokyo and Washington argue that removing the Futenma Marine Corps Air Station from Ginowan City and constructing a new base at Henoko will reduce the problem of noise pollution and the danger of plane crashes in crowded areas. But the people of Okinawa, including the people of Ginowan, have made clear that they do not consider moving these problems from one part of Okinawa to another as a "solution." Moreover, construction of this airbase would destroy the beautiful, though fragile, environment of Oura Bay, which is Japan's finest remaining coral sea and home of the dugong, a protected species of marine mammal, and other fish and plant life.

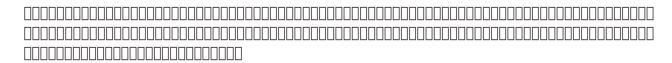
In November 2014, Okinawans overwhelmingly elected Takeshi Onaga, running on a platform to prevent construction of the base, as governor. He defeated incumbent governor Hirokazu Nakaima, who, after years of promising to oppose the new base construction, had suddenly signed the landfill permit. Nakaima caved into pressure from Tokyo, directly violating his campaign promise and betraying his constituents.

Governor Onaga, who has repeatedly stated his intention to do "everything in my power" to stop the base, appointed a Third Party Committee, a team of environmental and legal experts to identify legal flaws, if any, of the landfill permit, with the possibility of nullification of the permit in mind.

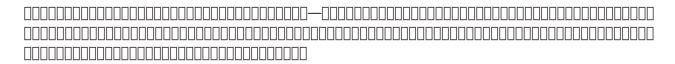
In July this Committee issued its report, which concluded that the landfill permit approved by former Governor Nakaima violates Japan's Public Waters Reclamation Law by failing to "sufficiently take into account environmental preservation and disaster prevention" and by failing to meet the criteria for "appropriate and rational use of national land." This accords with common sense: it does not require technical expertise to understand that the claim that you can dump three and a half million truckloads of dirt into a coral garden without causing serious environmental damage is patently absurd. Governor Onaga now has the evidence required to nullify the approval of the landfill permit that allowed Tokyo to proceed with base construction.

The Japanese government has responded by announcing a one-month suspension of construction work, and entered negotiations with the prefecture. However, in another slap in the face to the Okinawan people and their representatives, it insists that it will resume work on the base afterwards, regardless of the outcome of the "negotiations."

Governor Onaga holds the key to preventing this with his authority, backed by the Third-Party Committee report, to nullify the landfill permit approved by former Governor Nakaima. It is likely the Japanese government's fear of such an action that motivated its suspension of work and entrance into negotiations in hopes of pressuring Governor Onaga to end his opposition by promising huge economic development projects. But such attempts at bribery are an insult to the Okinawan people.



The Third Party Investigation has shown that the landfill permit issued by Governor Nakaima is legally flawed – in a word, illegal. This means that the governor is legally bound to nullify it. Such nullification was expected to come right after the Third Party Committee concluded, but to many Okinawans' surprise, Governor Onaga instead announced a one-month delay of any decision based on the Committee Report.



For Governor Onaga to fail to nullify the permit would make him complicit in an illegal project. Of course, the governor knows this, and he also knows that failure to act decisively would also probably trigger an explosion in Okinawan society.

The Okinawan people have made it absolutely clear that they want and expect the governor to nullify the landfill agreement unconditionally with no compromises and no deals.

We support them in this desire.

The world is watching.

- 1. Matthew Allen, professor (adjunct), Cairns Institute, James Cook University, Australia
- 2. Kozy Amemiya, Independent scholar specializing on Okinawan emigration
- 3. Andrea Arai, cultural anthropologist and lecturer in Japan and East Asian Studies, University of Washington
- 4. Frank Bardacke, Labor Historian
- 5. Herbert Bix, Emeritus Professor of History and Sociology, State University of New

- York at Binghamton ___________
- 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

- 13. Choi Sung-Hee, coordinator, Gangjeong village international team, Jeju Island, Korea
- 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
- 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
- 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

- 33. Joseph Gerson (PhD), Working Group for Asia-Pacific Peace & Demilitarization
- 34. Subrata Ghoshroy, Research Affiliate, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- 36. Mel Gurtov, Professor Emeritus of Political Science, Portland State University
- 37. Morton H Halperin, Former U.S. Government official (Departments of Defense and State and National Security Council)
- 38. Laura Hein, Professor, Northwestern University, Chicago
- 39. Edward Heinrich-Sanchez, Coordinator, Veterans for Peace, Ryukyu-Okinawa Chapter
- 40. Julie Higashi, Professor, Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto

- 43. Glenn D. Hook, Professor, University of Sheffield
- 44. Asato Ikeda, Assistant Professor, Fordham University
- 45. Masamichi (Marro) Inoue, Associate Professor, Department of Modern and Classical Languages, Literatures & Cultures / Japan Studies Program, University of Kentucky
- 46. Vincent J. Intondi, Associate Professor of History, Montgomery College

- 49. David T. Johnson, Professor of Sociology, University of Hawaii at Manoa
- 50. Sheila K. Johnson (Mrs. Chalmers Johnson), writer
- 52. Erin Jones, Researcher
- 53. John Junkerman, Filmmaker, Visiting Scholar at Waseda University
- 54. Kyle Kajihiro, a Board Member, Hawai'i Peace and Justice
- 55. Peter King, emeritus professor, University of Sydney
- 57. Joy Kogawa, author of *Obasan*
- 58. Pekka Korhonen, Professor of World Politics, University of Jyväskylä
- 60. Jeremy Kuzmarov, J.P. Walker assistant professor of history, University of Tulsa □□

- 61. Peter Kuznick, Professor of History, American University
- 62. Thomas Lamarre, Department of East Asian Studies, McGill University
- 63. Jon Letman, independent journalist, Lihue, Hawaii

- 66. Mairead Maguire, Nobel Peace laureate
- 67. Janice Matsumura, Associate professor, Simon Fraser University
- 68. Gavan McCormack, Professor Emeritus, Australian National University
- 69. Jo (Yosi) McIntire, Peace Activist, Scholar of International Relations
- 70. Richard H. Minear, professor of history (emeritus), University of Massachusetts
 Amherst
- 71. Jon Mitchell, Journalist
- 72. Michael Molasky, Professor of Asian Cultural Studies, Waseda University
- 73. R. Taggart Murphy, Professor, International Political Economy, University of Tsukuba, Tokyo Campus
- 74. Katherine Muzik, Marine Biologist, Kaua'i, Hawaii
- 75. Christopher Nelson, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- 76. Satoko Oka Norimatsu, Editor, The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus
- 77. Elin O'Hara Slavick, Professor, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
- 78. Peter B. Olney, Retired Organizing Director ILWU
- 79. Stephanie Ortoleva, Esq., President, Women Enabled International, International Human Rights & Women's Rights lawyer
- 80. Eiko Otake, Artist in residence, Wesleyan University
- 81. Koohan Paik, International Forum on Globalization, San Francisco
- 83. Charles Pellegrino, Deep Ocean Explorer/Astrobiologist/Forensic Archaeologist
- 84. John Price, Professor of History, University of Victoria
- 86. Betty A. Reardon, Founding Director Emeritus, International Institute on Peace Education
- 87. Simon Robinson, Okinawa Christian University, Okinawa Sudbury School

- 89. Jordan Sand, Professor of Japanese History, Georgetown University
- 90. Peter Dale Scott, Prof. Emeritus of English, University of California, Berkeley
- 91. Mark Selden, Senior Research Associate, East Asia Program at Cornell University
- 92. Franziska Seraphim, Associate Professor of Japanese History, Boston College
- 93. David H. Slater, Professor of Cultural Anthropology, Sophia University
- 94. Jeffrey St. Clair, journalist & editor, CounterPunch magazine
- 95. Oliver Stone, Filmmaker
- 96. Roy Tamashiro, Professor of Multidisciplinary Studies, Webster University
- 97. Miyume Tanji(Dr.), Australian National University [[[[]]][[[]][[]][[]][[]][[]][[]]
- 98. Vladimir Tikhonov, Professor at Oslo University [___________
- 100. Brian Victoria, Visiting Research Fellow,International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken)
- 101. David Vine, Associate Professor of Anthropology, American University
- 103. David Webb, Emeritus Professor, Leeds Beckett University; Convenor, Global Network against Weapons and Nuclear Power in Space; Chair, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
- 104. Piers R. Williamson, Specially Appointed Associate Professor, Research Faculty of Media and Communication, Hokkaido University
- 106. Lawrence Wittner, Professor of History Emeritus, State University of New York/Albany
- 107. Karel van Wolferen, Emeritus professor, University of Amsterdam, author
- 108. Dustin Wright, lecturer of history, University of California, Santa Cruz. [][][][][],

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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