

U.S. Military Base Construction in Okinawa Aggravates Racial Discrimination and Human Rights Violations

In early February 2012, two Okinawa-based organizations – the Association of the Indigenous Peoples in the Ryukyus (AIPR) and Citizens' Network for Biodiversity in Okinawa (Okinawa BD), together with IMADR, jointly submitted a request to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) to take immediate action in regard to the planned construction project of US military bases on Okinawa Island. Below is an excerpt from the letter submitted to CERD. CERD took immediate action upon receiving it, and sent an official letter dated March 9 to the Japanese government requesting clarification of the situation and the continuation of dialogue with CERD.

We are submitting this request to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination for consideration under its Early Warning Measures and Urgent Procedures and for immediate action concerning the construction of new U.S. military bases at two locations, Henoko/Oura Bay and Takae in the Yambaru forest, both in the northern part of Okinawa Island, Okinawa, Japan.

The Japanese and U.S. governments are forcing construction plans for new U.S. military bases upon the Ryukyuans/Okinawans and Japanese residents of Okinawa despite strong opposition. The Ryukyuans/Okinawans and Japanese residents of Okinawa already bear and suffer from the disproportionate “burden” of presence of U.S. military bases in Japan. 74% of U.S. military bases in Japan are concentrated in Okinawa, which consists of only 0.6 % of Japanese territory. The presence of the U.S. military bases has caused various problems for the Ryukyuans/Okinawans and Japanese residents of Okinawa, including accidents and crimes committed by U.S. military servicemen, “noise pollution” and environmental degradation.

These new bases, if constructed, will further impose gross and irreparable harm and damage to the lives of Ryukyuans/Okinawans and Japanese residents of Okinawa, as well as to the environment. In fact, the Japanese and U.S. governments have already undermined the rights of Ryukyuans/Okinawans to self-determination, livelihood, the environment and freedom of expression in the process of drawing up and implementing these plans.

With the high concentration of U.S. military bases and various problems caused by their presence, the new construction plans should be regarded as the manifestation of continuing discriminatory policies and practices and human rights violations by the Japanese and U.S. governments against Ryukyuans/Okinawans. Japanese residents of Okinawa are also being affected.

We call upon the Committee to consider this situation and take immediate action to stop the construction of problematic military bases in Henoko/Oura Bay and Takae, as well as help bring an end to the long- and wide-ranging discriminatory policies and practices and human rights violations against the Ryukyuans/Okinawans by the Japanese and U.S. governments.