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## **Joint Oral Statement: 34th session of the Human Rights Council Item 4: General Debate**

15 March 2017

Speaker: Taisuke KOMATSU (IMADR)

Thank you Mr. President,

Together with the All Okinawa Council for Human Rights, we would like to draw this Council's attention to the arbitrary arrests and detention of a prominent human rights defender in Japan, Hiroji Yamashiro. The chairman of the Okinawa Peace Movement Centre was arrested for an alleged minor crime on 17th October last year. Since then, he has been subject to two retroactive arrests. The latest arrest was made on 29th November for his conduct in January 2016, which he laid over a thousand concrete bricks with over a hundred protesters for three days in front of the gate of U.S. Camp Schwab Base to prevent the construction work of a new U.S. military base in Henoko, Okinawa. Despite the fact that it took place in front of police officers and Defence Bureau personnel, they did not arrest him at the scene but did so 10 months later.

As of today, he has been under pre-trial detention for almost 5 months. The Supreme Court denied bail on 20 February, and his detention is justified for a risk of destruction of evidence. However, a number of legal professionals pointed out that there is no such risk for his cases. The contacts from outside is restricted except for the lawyers or his lawyers-to-be. His wife was finally allowed to see him in detention on this Monday after 4 months and a half. Such strict measures are unusual for the minor charges which are imposed on him. Moreover, he has been recovering from malignant lymphoma since 2015. We are seriously concerned that the prolonged detention may cause negative impacts on his well-being. Many civil society groups in Japan have been condemning the arrests and detention as arbitrary measures.

We express our grave concern that Hiroji Yamashiro is selectively targeted due to his role as a leader of the non-violent peace movement against the U.S. military facilities in Ryukyu/ Okinawa. The series of measures against him spread a chilling effect among the civil society in Ryukyu/ Okinawa.

We call upon the Government of Japan to immediately release Hiroji Yamashiro. Last but not least, the Government must fully respect the rights of people of Ryukyu/ Okinawa to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, especially given the fact that Japan has been the main sponsor of the Council resolutions on civil society space.

Thank you Mr. President.

### **Organisations:**

Asia-Pacific Human Rights Information Center

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

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International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR)