

Women in Okinawa — Continuing struggle against the violence of US Military

by Suzuyo Takazato

Five years have passed since the Beijing World Conference but this period of five years was that of turmoil for Okinawa.

Active Movements of Women's Groups

The new perspective, introduced by the 1993 Vienna Conference, that the rape of women is a war crime, was inherited by the declaration of the Beijing World Conference. This was an important key catalyst for the future of Okinawan women. Okinawa is not under occupation nor is it a colony, but there are many conflicts and violence caused by the U.S. military presence of fifty years. In this kind of environment, we should ask ourselves whether human rights are respected in Okinawa. In the Beijing declaration, the issues of violence caused by foreign military forces are not raised. In contrast, governments' "cut in military expenditure" was considered to be an "excess," and the issue was further obscured. However, we would like to aim for a world without armed conflicts, armaments or military violence by extending the defined sphere of war crimes against women from "under armed conflict situations" to "under situations of long-term military presence" as well.

We would like to demand the following:

Reaffirm that rape in armed conflicts constitutes a war crime and, under certain circumstances, it constitutes a crime against humanity and an act of genocide as defined in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crimes of Genocide; take all

measures required for the protection of women and children from such acts and strengthen mechanisms to investigate and punish all those responsible and bring the perpetrators to justice (Beijing Platform of Action 147 e.);

Uphold and reinforce standards set out in international humanitarian law and international human conflicts; undertake a full investigation of all acts of violence against women committed during war, including rape, in particular systematic rape, forced prostitution and other forms of indecent assault and sexual slavery; prosecute all criminals responsible for war crimes against women and provide full redress to women victims." (Beijing Platform of Action 147 f.)

Rape Incident by Three U.S. Military Soldiers

- Silence Exacerbates Violence

A rape incident by three U.S. Soldiers against a girl, which occurred at the time of the Beijing Conference, made us realize how strongly the daily lives of citizens and the U.S. military station are linked. The victim, a twelve-year old girl said, "I do not want this to happen to other girls." She joined the inspection of the scene as a sign of protest against the assailants. The women at the Beijing conference stood up and protested through the media. Soon, other women's group

meetings and demonstrations followed.

Women's Groups That Do Not Accept the Military and the Base

The silencing of ideas is a factor of violence and to exterminate the military's structural violence, the "Okinawa Women Act Against Military Bases" was established. For twelve days, twenty-five people staged a sit-down protest against the Prime Minister and the Foreign Ministry and handed a request. The contents were a.) To go over past U.S. military crimes b.) To apologize and pay compensation c.) To go over the diplomacy and d.) To seek the uniformity of foreign conventions and the "Beijing Declaration."

Post-War U.S. Military Forces' Crime Chronology Against Women

Even after the Cold War, the U.S. government justifies its military presence in Asia as a peace-keeping force by using North Korea and China as the basis for redefining the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty. Yet, as the human rights violations committed by members of the military structure are considered to be outside of government affairs, preventive measures are insufficient. The crimes statistics began on May 15th, 1972, and is under the jurisdiction of the Okinawa prefectural police. There are no reliable statistics, as only 3 to 5 rape incidents per year are shown in the data. Thus, we must not forget the existence of the many women who are in silence. That is why we started an original research.

On October, 1995, Dayton Newspaper from Ohio, U.S.A., researched materials related to the army and they reported that in all U.S. foreign military bases, Japan (that is, Okinawa) had the highest crime rate. Yet, inside the military, punishment against sexual crimes is very mild; even if a serviceman is found guilty in the military court, the crime record is erased at the time of discharge, and nothing is transferred to FBI records. If the realities of

military organization are such, it is no wonder the realities for women near military bases are even more severe.

The "chronological table of U.S. military crimes against women" states that for 800 rape victims, there are 2000 U.S. military assailants. The contents of the crimes are 1.) 2-6 people attack the woman, and hand her over to another group 2.) Possession of knives and guns. A man who attempted to rescue a woman was stabbed to death 3.) The age of the victims are nine months, six years, nine years, thirteen years to 60 years old. 4.) Take the woman to military barracks and other 20 to 30 military men join. 5.) Crimes take place in farms, rivers, wells, roads, homes, workplaces, trucks, jeeps, and numerous other places 6.) Rape and murder 7.) Killings of babies held by the mother 8.) Childbirth by rape 9.) Especially during the Vietnam War, the number of strangulations after rape was large 10.) Most of these crimes are unpunished.

The Network Inside and Outside of Japan, Two Places of Okinawa Peace Network

The Okinawa Peace Network began in San Francisco and Los Angeles from the two "Peace Caravans" in which 13 women had participated. This organization has especially earned support in the areas of environment and human rights; it is also involved in protest movements against the militarization of the members' own countries, as well as in submitting articles to local newspapers concerning Okinawa.

Moreover, in these three years, women from Korea, the Philippines, Japan, and the U.S.A held the East Asia-America International Women's Network Conference. The receiving countries of the U.S. military and the U.S. attack the roots of the problems through cooperative activities on violence against women, environmental pollution, children's human rights, laws and conventions. In the

U.S., it is said that the rise of national military expenditure exerted pressure on the medical, educational and welfare expenses and, ironically, children of low-income households had to join the military. Also, the percentage of teachers who have had experience in the military is high, and this throws serious problems on the educational environment.

The various members of the East Asia-America International Women's Network also cooperatively hosted three symposiums at the "Hague Appeal for Peace" held on May, 1999.

The third Conference was held in Okinawa from June 22nd to the 25th. At this International Women's Summit – with the theme of "Redefining Security for Women and Children" – the participation of women from areas under armed conflicts was greatly welcomed.

Asia-Pacific NGO Women's Forum for Women 2000

On August, 1998, the "Asia-Pacific NGO Women's Forum" was held in Thailand as a preparation for the 2000 World Conference on Women. I was able to include the topic of "violence against women by long term foreign military bases," which was not mentioned in the Beijing Platform for Action, in the subcommittee on "women and armed conflict." Also, at the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) Conference that was held in Thailand on October, 1998, Yayori Matsui presented the theme "Violence Against Women by Long-Term Foreign Military Presence," which included the situation of Okinawa. It is ironic that the woman representative from the U.S. Government asked for the elimination of the item.

The situation in Okinawa – five years since the rape incident

The Deception of the SACO Final Report

Five years since the Beijing Conference and the rape incident have passed, and the Okinawa prefectural and local governments are moving towards the economy and "money" rather than human rights and environmental issues. On December, 1996, the Special Action Committee on Okinawa (SACO) presented a Final Report on Okinawa. It emphasizes the importance of steadily realizing its guidelines in order to reduce Okinawa's base burden. This was the answer given to Okinawan people's outcry after the girl's rape incident against the pressure from military bases.

However, what exactly did the Japanese and U.S. governments agree upon? One was the transferring of the Futenma base to Henoko in order to run smoothly the new system of the Osprey Helicopter, the latest U.S. helicopter

model. Also, the return of half of the Northern Training Area is accompanied by a plan to newly construct the seven helipads of the returned land in the area that will continue to be used. The area of the helipads will become twice the present size and will be similarly used for the Osprey Helicopters. It is also true for all the other bases that the reform was to strengthen the function of the military bases, not to reduce the damages caused by them. According to certain sources, these kinds of military base "reforms" already existed in the U.S. Marine's basic military plans of the 1970s.

Even though the rape incident was apologized for by President Clinton, the SACO Final Report presented by the Japanese and U.S. governments, supposedly for the prefectural citizens, was full of deception. This means that even the girl's rape incident was

used for the reinforcement of the military. What a frightening reality.

Thus, we should again recognize that in order to diminish military base readjustments and to eliminate military violence, we need a reduction of the military – the device of violence – and the withdrawal of the bases, not a simple transfer of them to a new site. Moreover, it should be noted that the SACO Final Report “for the good of the prefectural citizens” does not include plans for military withdrawal.

The Network for Women's Voices to Reach You

The transfer of the Futenma base filled people with anxiety. However, in return, it fostered women's unyielding convictions against such situations. For example, during the local referendum two years ago, the “Kamadugua Group” from the Ginowan region of the Futenma base and the “Jannu Group” from the proposed site of the military sea-based facilities (SBF) joined forces to inform the anxious elders about the situation. The women of Okinawa are creating a wide network at the same time that they feel each other's uniqueness, such as the women of Naha City helping the telephone strategy of the women of Nago City, and are fighting the severe situations.

“Do not allow the construction of new bases, do not need SBF bases on the ocean where jurgons live” – two years have passed since the citizens of Nago won the controversial local referendum for the protection of the environment, rather than for measures of regional promotion.

The winning of a Nago mayor and a Governor of Okinawa who are not active in the military base problems increased the distress among Nago and prefectural citizens. The Japan-U.S. military alliance, the governments in charge of promoting SACO, are trying to fish people's hearts with various aid projects,

such as guaranteeing 10 years worth of the yearly 100 billion yen expenditure.

Women from Futami City, 10 other districts, Nago, Ginowan, Shimajiri and Naha got together and began their movement at the start of the new year. From January 16th, every Sunday from 2 p.m., they protested on the streets of Nago. These activities originated from the Korean women who held weekly meetings in front of the Japanese Embassy concerning the issues of comfort women and in front of the gates of military bases in order to eliminate U.S. military crimes.

The Network for Women's Voices to Reach You started on December 27, 1997, from the discussions about the Higa City Mayor who, despite the winning of Nago's election by those against the acceptance of military bases, signed the agreement to accept the bases at the Prime Minister's home and resigned soon after. On January 9th, 1998, 300 women poured into the lobby of the Prefectural Office and succeeded in making Governor Ota of Okinawa take the stance against the transfer of bases within the prefecture. In May, 125 people interacted with each other and with many women's groups as they marched down the streets of Tokyo. Also, the plan to transfer the Futenma base was announced in Nago, where the Okinawa Summit was held, once more forcing Nago into the military base issue and becoming the core of the women's network for the anti-military base movement.

