Agenda item 4b) Human Right

Joint statement by
Association of Indigenous Peoples in the Ryukyus, Save the Dugongs Foundation and Shimin Gaikou Centre
Makiko Kimura

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

I speak on behalf of Association of Indigenous Peoples in the Ryukyus and Save the Dugongs Foundation, organizations from Okinawa, who are unable to be present at the PFII.

On May 1, 2006, the US and Japanese governments reached a final agreement on the US military base reform in Japan which includes the construction of a new Marine US airbase in Henoko, in the City of Nago on the eastern coast of Okinawa Island. The construction of the massive offshore base was planned since from 1996. Although residents of Nago voted against the new base in a 1997 citizens' referendum, the Japanese government ignored the result and has kept pressurizing the local autonomous bodies to accept the construction. This policy clearly violates the Article 26 of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as well as the Article 5 of International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

At the end of World War II, United States military forces unilaterally expropriated part of the land area of Okinawa violating the Hague Regulations Concerning the Laws and Customs of Land Warfare. Okinawa, which occupies only 0.6% of the national land, has been imposed 75% of all US military facilities stationing in the nation. The situation continues even after Okinawa returned to Japan. In 1996, the government made a new law only applicable to Okinawa. The law, apparently discriminatory and unconstitutional, officially enables the state to ignore and dismantle the will of the local people in Okinawa. No one could deny that this is the continuation of discriminatory treatment by the Japanese government. The same is pointed out in the paragraph 51 of the report on “contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance” written by the United Nations Special Rapporteur, Mr. Doudou Diene.

Oura Bay, where the government has been planning to build the offshore airbase, happens to be the primary habitat of the critically endangered Okinawa dugong (salt-water manatee). According to a study funded by Pro Natura Foundation-Japan, dugong supposedly breeds only in the eastern coast of Okinawa Island, where a massive US military base lies exercising the military trainings. In
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addition, there are strong concerns about additional water pollution, the destruction of the coral reefs by amphibious vehicles, and the possible damage to the entire marine environment that may be caused by the sonar system of US submarines.

We are strongly against the Japan and US government’s agreement which ignores the self-determination of the Okinawan people. We urge both the governments to follow the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) resolutions and to assess the environmental effects of the proposed construction of military facilities and training plans.

We demand that the Permanent Forum should:
1. Immediately form a research group that will conduct a research on indigenous land and military bases and complete a paper on the issue.
2. Recommend that the US and Japanese government conclude an agreement that will protect and promote indigenous properties, fundamental freedom and human rights of indigenous peoples.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

* In 2000 International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) reached a resolution on conservation of dugong, Okinawa woodpecker and Okinawa rail, listing a series of requests to the Japanese and US governments: The resolution
1. URGES the Government of Japan:
   a) to complete as soon as possible the voluntary Environmental Impact Assessment on the construction of the military facilities in and around the habitat of the Dugong;
   b) to implement as soon as possible Dugong conservation measures that will help stop further reduction of the population and help its recovery;
   c) to prepare as soon as possible a conservation plan for the biodiversity and endangered species of the Yambaru and the local Dugong population, and conduct detailed studies of these species and their habitats,
   d) to consider nomination of the Yambaru as a World Heritage Site;
2. URGES the Government of the United States of America to cooperate on the voluntary Environmental impact Assessment, as requested by the Government of Japan;
3. URGES the Governments of Japan and the United States of America:
   a) to take into account the findings of the voluntary Environmental impact Assessment and on this basis take appropriate measures to help ensure the Dugong population;
b) to assess the environmental effects of the proposed construction of military facilities and training plans, taking into account the studies referred to in subpara 1(c), and on this basis take appropriate measures to help ensure the survival of the Okinawa Woodpecker and Okinawa Rail.