

**3rd Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council's
Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**

United Nations: Geneva, Switzerland

July 12th—July 15th, 2010

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

The Association of the Indigenous Peoples in the Ryukyus(AIPR)

Tomomi Ganeko

Thank you, Chairperson.

My name is Tomomi Ganeko from Ryukyu/Okinawa, Japan.

At present there have been many infringements on the rights of Ryukyuan-Okinawans, But at this time we would like to focus our report on the problems arising from noncompliance with Article 8, Article 11 paragraph 2, Article 12, and Article 13 paragraph 1 of the Declaration. Problems of this nature have been caused by the failure of the government of Japan to recognize the Ryukyuan-Okinawans as an indigenous people. Therefore, we request an immediate recommendation from the United Nations addressing the matters outlined below in order to resolve the problems facing the Ryukyuan-Okinawans.

We will first present the historical background. Until its annexation by Japan by force of arms in 1879, the Ryukyus possessed its own language, history and culture as a distinct nation. After annexing the Ryukyus, Japan has forced its policy of assimilation on the Ryukyuan-Okinawans and has deprived us of such things as our language, history, culture and our sense of value. During the final part of the War in the Pacific, there were ground battles on the main island of Okinawa and on the other islands. In briefly summarizing this fighting, we were sacrificed in the strategy to protect mainland Japan in order to safeguard the interests of the nation. At that time, the Japanese military committed many criminal acts against the Ryukyuan-Okinawans. Even when the Ryukyuan-Okinawans were cornered by the Japanese forces and the forces of the enemy (the U.S. troops), the Japanese military would not allow the people to surrender under any circumstances. As the results, the Ryukyuan-Okinawans were made to engage in fatal acts killing their own beloved family members and their friends at the command or direction of the Japanese military.

Since the year 2007, however, the nation of Japan by its actions to erase the facts pertaining to the wrongful acts of the Japanese military has altered the actual facts in

its history textbooks concerning the sufferings inflicted during the Battle of Okinawa and has been trying to avoid teaching about the offences committed by Japan as a nation. This is in violation of Article 8 of the Declaration.

In addition, the policy of assimilation after annexation has deprived the Ryukyuan-Okinawans of their freedom of belief and religion and has resulted in the violation of their rights. Using enacted laws as a basis, the government of Japan has enshrined the Ryukyuan-Okinawan civilian dead from the Battle of Okinawa at the Yasukuni Shrine "without reaching an agreement by prior notice." The government of Japan and the Yasukuni Shrine have enshrined the civilian victims in the same manner as the military dead at the Shrine.

This act is in violation of two articles of the Declaration. First of all, it is in violation of Article 12 which guarantees freedom of belief and religion. We say this because this act forces upon the Ryukyuan-Okinawans a religion that is different from the religious system that is held by us. Secondly, the enshrinement of Ryukyuan-Okinawans who were everyday citizens and who were casualties in the Battle of Okinawa goes counter to the facts concerning their sufferings.

It can be said that this is also in violation of Article 13 paragraph 1 which entitles us to pass this fact on to future generations.

The point just presented are from the events stemming from the Battle of Okinawa that have resulted in the violation of our rights.

A consideration of past history to the present shows that the cause of the Ryukyuan-Okinawans being subjected to infringements of their rights in actuality lies in the non-acknowledgement on the part of the government of Japan of the status of the Ryukyuan-Okinawans as an indigenous people.

Since the government of Japan has proclaimed to the world its endorsement of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, it should be obligated to acknowledge us, Ryukyuan-Okinawans, as an indigenous people and to listen to the voice of the Ryukyuan-Okinawans, but in practice a chain of structural discrimination is continuing. The examples presented are in violation of Article 8, Article 11 paragraph 2, Article 12, and Article 13 paragraph 1 of the Declaration.

It is our fervent hope that the United Nations will advise the government of Japan to

acknowledge the Ryukyuan-Okinawans as an indigenous people within Japan.

Thank you, Chairperson.