

United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues  
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**Joint Statement**  
Association of the Indigenous Peoples in the Ryukyus (AIPR)  
Shimin Gaikou Centre

Tomomi Ganeko

Thank you, Mr/Madame Chairperson.

My name is Tomomi Ganeko, and I represent Association of the Indigenous Peoples in the Ryukyus. I would like to report the territorial issue in the indigenous people's traditional land in Ryukyu/Okinawa and highlight the need for the UN to make a comprehensive study to protect the rights of indigenous peoples in the disputed border areas.

Ryukyus consist of 160 islands and are located in between Japan, Taiwan and China in the East China Sea. Iigunkuba Islands, which is also called Senkaku Islands in Japan and Diaoyu Islands in China, and located 160 km north of Iriomote island, becomes one of the largest territorial issue among Japan, Taiwan and China, and all the governments have ignored the rights of the people of Ryukyus.

The Iigunkuba islands (Senkaku island) is a part of traditional territory of the people of the Ryukyus. Since Ryukyu was an independent Kingdom (1429-1879), the Islands were marks of the trading voyage to great China and important ship route. The sea around Iigunkuba Islands was a very good fishing area for indigenous fishermen and they used to conduct fishery around the sea area. But recently, the fisherman denied access to the area because of the territorial issue among three countries, and they spend very tough life.

It is thought that there is no natural resource in the Iigunkuba Islands till the 1960's. But the situation has changed after UN-ECAFE (Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East) announced the result of their academic research in 1968. They pointed out that there

was rich petroleum potential around the East China Sea. Since then, China started to claim the territorial right over the area and it became the most sensitive territorial issue between China and Japan.

In 2010, a Chinese fishing boat collided with Japanese coast guard ships near disputed islands in the East China Sea. In April 2012, the governor of Tokyo, Shintaro Ishihara announced that Tokyo Metropolitan Government is willing to buy Iigunkuba Islands from the present private owner. When he visited Washington D.C., the issues becomes more sensitive among three countries. And in this issue, again, the right of the Ryukyu people to their territory has been ignored by the government of Japan.

The idea of one sided territorial claim among countries without recognizing the historical fact that the Iigunkuba Islands has been a territory of Ryukyu kingdom and the right of indigenous people, will lead to the conflict. If any international dispute arises in this area, the Ryukyu people are the one who suffers most. Furthermore, there is a possibility that it would lead to arbitrary extractive practice involving multinational and domestic companies. Once it happens, it might cause migration from mainland Japan, which would further deteriorate our indigenous language, culture, and traditional knowledge.

I was taught by my ancestors, the peoples of Ryukyus, that our land and territory should not be treated as a merchandise for business use. They are precious base to our livelihood and the source of lives. Therefore, I think our land and territory should be protected and preserved for future generations. Concerned countries should talk and discuss sincerely how to preserve the nature and for the people in future. I urge that the territorial issue over Iigunkuba Islands should be discussed in consultation with the expert for Ryukyu people.

I request to UNPFII to recommend the following:

- 1) That the Government of Japan recognize the People of Ryukyus as an indigenous people, and have a wide consultation with Ryukyu people, including the territorial issue over the Iigunkuba Islands.

2) That the Governments of Japan, Taiwan and China make an effort not to cause of crises and make diplomatic efforts to solve the issue peacefully. The concerned governments should respect the territorial rights of Indigenous Peoples set aside the dispute.

3) That the relevant UN organs, including Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous people and the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to send a comprehensive investigation team including indigenous people's right to the Iigunkuba Islands.

4) That the UNPFII should conduct a study on impact on Indigenous Peoples in the disputed territories that belongs to Indigenous Peoples.

Thank you.