

Save Orchid Island !

--- Voice of Yami

Orchid Island is a small island situated in the Western Pacific off the south-east coast of Taiwan. It is approximately 45 square kilometers in area and has abundant rainfall. Almost one hundred protected rare plant and animal species live in the island's tropical forest. Of these one, *Otus scops*, is threatened with extinction.

The island not only has rich natural resources, but is also the area in which the Yami tribe lives. The Yami people's distinctive culture is an even more valuable example of one of the most well preserved oceanic cultures. The Yami population numbers about 3,100 people living scattered over the island's low land. Within the Yami society there are no clearly defined class distinctions. They are a peace-loving, optimistic and gentle people. Among all the original tribes of Taiwan they are the only one that did not practice head-hunting. Their social life is based on the observance of natural principles and is against the use of force. It also includes great respect for elders. This system rests on the strict observance of working together for the mutual benefit of all. This spirit of working together for the mutual benefit of all is of great advantage to people. When a Yami person builds his own house, the whole tribe will co-operate in order to help him do this. Everybody works together in the fields to produce food and everybody co-operates in the catching of fish. The economic life of the tribe is the result of joint discussion. The tribe's fate and general affairs are decided by mutual consultation. Yami culture is extremely rich and complex.

After the take-overs of **Orchid Island** by the Taiwan Government in 1946, the island's natural resources and human culture have suffered serious changes. The first intrusion of the Taiwan Government occurred in 1958 when about 2,500 convicts were sent to Orchid Island to serve their sentences. They were guarded by retired servicemen of the KMT(Kuomintang, the nationalist party). In order to build accommodation they took the land that the Yami used to produce their principal crop, taro. They were permitted to roam the island and took advantage of this to rape the Yami women and smash the people's possessions. They did not leave until 1979. In 1960 the Taiwan Government completely cut down Orchid Island's tropical forest, destroying the habitat of many rare species of plants and animals. After this they established schools in all the tribal areas to teach Han Chinese culture, history, language, etc. All of this was in order to influence Yami children, so that they would lose their mother tongue, and cause the transmission of the Yami cultural heritage to come to a halt. Yami culture was replaced by Han culture and traditional Yami buildings were torn down and replaced by ugly concrete

block houses. Within ten years the concrete buildings began to crumble. The beautiful, traditional housing thus disappeared. The traditional celebration on the completion of a new house was also lost in the process. The Yami's proud culture has thus been extensively wiped out by the intense efforts to impose Han culture.

In addition in 1977 the Taiwan Government carried out an even more malevolent plan by making **Orchid Island** into a nuclear waste dump to store poisonous nuclear waste from Taiwan's nuclear power plants. In the 13 years since 1982, the amount of nuclear waste stored exceeds 100,000 barrels. Due to the lack of care in storage more than 30,000 barrels have started to rust and leak. The workers on the nuclear waste sites even permit the dumping of radioactive and poisoned earth and water into nearby seas, seriously polluting the water in which the Yami tribes do their fishing. This has caused an increase in the number of cancer-related deaths and children with learning disabilities for those who have to eat contaminated fish. Today there are over 50 children, who have been born with birth defects. It is very possible that the effects of nuclear waste are the cause of these cases. The Taiwan Power (Taipower) Company's plan to increase the number of nuclear waste disposal trenches clearly shows the Taiwan Government's callous misconduct of affairs in Orchid Island. This could really spell the final extinction of the Yami people. The Taiwan Government's contemptuous misconduct and malicious behavior towards the Yami people seriously infringe human rights and should be condemned by the international community.

Because of this all the Yami people have risen up to defend their homeland. From 1988 until now, we have already carried out almost 10 protest marches in order to curb the Taiwan Government's inhumane policies and infringement of human rights. Because we are a weak ethnic minority people, the Taiwan Government's callous attitude has given us a sense of hopelessness and filled us with sorrow. In June President Lee Teng-Hui of Taiwan visited America and gave a speech in which he raised the idea, "The wishes of the people are always in my heart." The Yami people hope very much that he can really carry out "the wishes of the people" by ridding Orchid Island of nuclear waste in accordance with our demands. We hope and sincerely request that more international friends support our anti-nuclear waste movement to **save Orchid Island**. Moreover we earnestly request you to write letters to Lee Teng-Hui asking him to stop the genocidal policies toward Orchid Island's Yami people.

Yami delegate,

Shiyman Feaien, 1995

(Translated by Katharine Harwood)

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Join the Yami People to Stop Further Expansions of Nuclear Dumps

Since Taipower (the state-owned Taiwan Power Company) began its commercial operation of nuclear power plants 20 years ago, the government has never seriously confronted the thorny issues of nuclear waste disposal. To this date, there has been no concrete short- or long-term disposal plans for spent fuels. Presently, Taipower has dumped all other nuclear wastes onto the beautiful isle, Orchid Island, home to the three thousand Yami indigenous people.

The secret plan to deposit the low and medium levels of nuclear wastes on Orchid Island began in 1972 by telling the indigenous people that the government was constructing a fish cannery for the benefits of the inhabitants. Dumpings began in 1982 amid the protests, and the largest protest by the Yami people and Taiwanese erupted in 1987. In spite of the continuous protests taking place every year since, Taipower has continued its policy of dumping the wastes on the island's fragile ecosystem. Today Orchid Island is a dumping ground of 89,000 barrels of nuclear wastes, their weights totalled 37,600 tons. Since, the livelihood of the 3,000 Yami people has been in shamble and their unique culture has been ruthlessly trampled.

To appease the Yami people in 1993 as "the year of the indigenous peoples" world-wide, declared by the UN, the government agreed to stop further construction of waste disposal sites on the island and plans were offered to withdraw all the waste elsewhere in the near future. The government further promised the Yami tribe that they would be consulted if there was any change of the plan. The Yami tribe accepted the government's offer, and stopped further protests.

It turned out to be a conspiracy. In early May 1995, Taipower began its expansion plan of six more waste dumps on the island by declaring that the plan was a "national security" project, i.e., the plan did not require any consultation with the local government or the affected tribe. The frustrated Yami people are now planning their biggest protest !

Unfortunately as usual, the Yami tribe is a minority lacking of political power, material and financial resources to fight off this uphill battle for their homeland, basic existence and dignity. They urgently need our help world-wide.

Please make sure that you do something to help by registering your concern and request that any further construction of wastes dumps be stopped on the island to:

1. *President Lee Teng-Hweh*
President Building
Taipei, Taiwan
2. *Premier Lien Zhang*
executive Building
Taipei, Taiwan
3. *Chairman Hsu Yi-Yun*
Atomic Energy Council
Taipei, Taiwan

4. *Chairman Chang Chung-Chien*
Taipower
Taipei, Taiwan
5. *Speaker Liu Sung-Feng*
Legislative Branch
Taipei, Taiwan

The Anti-Nuclear Coalition for Taiwan
Edgar Lin, Pi-Yao Lin
Box 843, Tunghai University
Taichung, TAIWAN 407