

Third Session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

United Nations

Geneva, Switzerland

July 12-16, 2010

Association of Indigenous Peoples of the Ryukyus

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Thank you, Chairperson.

My name is Reina Uema from Ryukyu/Okinawa, Japan.

What I will be addressing today is agenda item 3, 'study on indigenous peoples and the right to participate in decision-making.' I believe that the Okinawa case is an obvious example of the lack of consultation of indigenous peoples in the decision-making process.

I will now begin by giving a short introduction regarding the historic background. Ryukyu/Okinawa was an independent state known as 'Ryukyu Kingdom' before the annexation by Japan in 1879. After the annexation, a forced assimilation policy was carried out by the Japanese government against Ryukyu people and effort was taken to abolish our identity, precious language and culture. For example, in 1945, at the very end of the World War II, the Japanese Army regarded Ryukyu people who spoke their own language as collaborators of the Allied Forces and many civilians were killed by the Japanese Army in the battle of Okinawa.

Referring to the present situation, 75 percent of the US military bases on Japanese soil are concentrated in Okinawa, which covers only 0.6 percent of the total territory of Japan and 1.4 million people in Ryukyu/Okinawa represents only 1 percent of the total Japanese population, despite the US-Japan Security Treaty that does not state that only Okinawa should be burdened with US military bases. Environmental destruction, noise pollution, and atrocities such as rape and murder by the US army personnel are very serious problems and threats, especially for children and adolescents who live around the US bases. In fact, a US army helicopter crashed into my university, Okinawa International University, on August 13, 2004.

While the other US bases on the mainland of Japan are originally state-owned lands, the majority of US bases in Okinawa consists of private lands, which the US army robbed during the battle of Okinawa. This act violates article 46 of the the Hague Convention in 1907, as well as article 10 of United Nations Declaration of the Rights on Indigenous Peoples (DRIPs), which prohibits forced removal. In addition, the fact that US military bases remain in Okinawa violates the article 30 of

DRIPs, which forbids the use of Indigenous lands for military activities.

We, Ryukyu/Okinawa people, have been expressing our opposition to the US military bases through Okinawa prefecture rallies and local referendums. However, the Japanese government ignores our objections to the US base and negotiates only with the US government over treaties on the US military bases and tries to strengthen and expand the bases in Okinawa. We have no chance to express our opinion and our opposition to the US bases has never been reflected in the decision-making process. About the latest case, the Democratic Party promised to relocate Marine Corps Air Station Futenma outside of Okinawa in their manifesto during the election. However, after they took power in September 2009, they changed their policy and decided to relocate Futenma base within Okinawa territory in May 2010, despite the fact all politicians and political groups in Okinawa appealed to the Japanese government to carry out the manifesto. From the above, we can conclude that Ryukyu/Okinawa has suffered under structural discrimination.

Therefore, we would like to make following recommendations:

A first step of participation of Indigenous Peoples in decision making process is the simple recognition of Ryukyu/Okinawa people as an Indigenous People by the Japanese government.

Second, strong and united opinions of Indigenous Peoples must be respected in the decision making process. Regarding our case, the Japanese government should immediately take measures to relocate the US bases outside of Okinawa.

Third, State parties should enact a law for protection of human rights and establish an independent human rights organization under the Paris principle to wholly implement UN DRIPs and ensure effective consultation between governments and Indigenous Peoples. The Japanese government should respect the recommendation of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination submitted in March 2010.

Finally, I also would like to request that the EMRIP shall look into the case of Okinawa as a model case for the lack of consultation on using Indigenous lands for military activities, enshrined in article 30, section 2 of DRIPs.

Thank you, Chairperson.