

Peace Declaration

A terrible and tragic war once raged on this beautiful island.

Our island was burnt to the ground and many precious lives were lost as a result of air raids and shelling by a tremendous number of artillery shells, known as the "typhoon of steel".

We learned about the foolishness of war, the preciousness of life, and the importance of peace from that tragic experience.

I wonder how our ancestors view Okinawa and the world today, 79 years after the war?

Okinawa is still burdened by the existence of vast U.S. military bases, incidents and accidents involving U.S. military personnel, and environmental problems stemming from the U.S. military bases.

In addition, the rapid expansion of the deployment of the Self-Defense Forces is underway in accordance with the "Three Security Documents," and combined with the memories of the tragic Battle of Okinawa, we, the people of Okinawa, have a strong sense of dread.

Is the current situation in Okinawa supposed to comfort and console the souls of those who were sacrificed, leaving behind regretful memories?

In the past, upon Okinawa's reversion to the mainland, the Japanese government stated, "Making Okinawa an island of peace and a new stage for economic and cultural exchange between Japan and the Asian continent, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific region at large is the way to comfort the souls of the many people who gave their precious lives on this land, and it is the pledge of the people of Okinawa who wish for the return of Okinawa to their homeland.

In order to realize the island of peace that the Okinawan people desire, we must strive for a prompt solution to the base problem, including the downsizing and reduction of U.S. military bases in Okinawa, the expeditious elimination of the danger of the Futenma Air Station, and the abandonment of the construction of a new base in Henoko.

Looking at current world affairs, conflicts are still raging on, such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the situation in Israel and Palestine. We continue to repeat the mistakes of war.

In East Asia, the security environment has become more complex, with the U.S.-China confrontation, China's military buildup, and problems over Taiwan and the Korean Peninsula, where the strengthening of deterrence has instead increased regional tensions due to the country's own military buildup, while close economic ties coexist.

What is required of each country and region for global peace and stability is to solve problems through peaceful diplomacy, dialogue, and other processes based on inclusiveness and tolerance, which recognize differences in values and embrace diversity.

We, the people of Okinawa, have a history of building relationships of trust through exchanges with neighboring countries in the spirit of "*Bankoku Shinryo* (bridge between nations)," and we have inherited a spiritual culture of mutual support and acceptance of diverse values such as "*nuchi du takara* (life is the treasure)," "*yuimaaru* (spirit of cooperation)," and "*chimugukuru* (compassionate heart)."

The "New Proposal," the "Cornerstone of Peace," and the "Okinawa Peace Prize" are expressions of the "Okinawan spirit" for peace, which is a universal value of humanity, and everlasting peace in the world is the earnest wish of the Okinawan people.

I am convinced that Okinawa will become a site of international peace creation, and in the spirit of "*Bankoku Shinryo*," Okinawa will spread the "Okinawan spirit" domestically and internationally, and conduct regional diplomacy to contribute to world peace, promote mutual development, and resolve international issues, which will contribute to reducing regional tension and building trust, and lead to eternal peace in the world.

Jane Goodall, a UN Peace Messenger and global environmental activist working on conservation and humanitarian issues, said, "You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make."

These words give us courage that the thoughts and actions of each and every one of us,

however small, *certainly* have the power to change the world.

What is required of each and every one of us now more than ever is not to give up on the current absurd situation, but to have the courage to speak up, stand up, and take action, even if only a little bit.

With the spiritual culture inherited from our predecessors, let us work together to build a society that is respectful and considerate of others, and let us make unceasing efforts toward the abolition of nuclear weapons, the renunciation of war, and the establishment of everlasting peace.

Today, on Memorial Day, we offer our sincere condolences to the souls of all the victims of war, and we also declare that we will deny all acts that lead to war, and will continue to wish for a higher level of peace, including "human security" that places importance on human dignity, and will make every effort to make our island an international peace-making center that contributes to lasting peace in the world. We hereby declare that we will continue to work with all our might to make this island a center for the creation of international peace that contributes to the lasting peace of the world.

June 23, 2024

Denny Tamaki
Governor of Okinawa Prefecture