

Peace Declaration

The storms of war raged across our islands of Okinawa and reduced it to wasteland.

The people of Okinawa experienced the absurdity and cruelty of war, pushed to the brink under unimaginable circumstances.

Now, 74 years have passed.

Whenever survivors who have stifled their unpleasant memories make testimonies of their experiences to pass them on to the next generation, we renew our determination that war, in which people lose their humanity, is never the answer.

The people of Okinawa overcame the chaos and devastation of the post-war period and lived through U.S. military occupation to regain their rights and self-governance.

What they won through their blood, sweat, and tears have served as a foundation for our society and paved the way for a century of hope.

Currently, Okinawa has seen steady development each step of the way thanks to efforts by its citizens and many supporters.

Despite this and the 74 years that have transpired since the end of the war, approximately 70.3% of the facilities for the exclusive use of the U.S. forces in Japan are concentrated in Okinawa Prefecture, which only accounts for 0.6% of Japan's total land area.

We cannot help but say that the existence of vast U.S. military bases is now a hindrance to the potential of Okinawa's development.

For 47 years since Okinawa's reversion to Japan, the people of Okinawa have been forced to live with the anxiety and excessive burden of the bases such as repeated incidents, accidents, and environmental problems including noise pollution.

Earlier this April, a sad and tragic incident was caused by a Navy sailor assigned to the 3rd Marine Division.

In addition to fulfilling Okinawans' dearest wish of proceeding with the reduction and consolidation of U.S. military bases, a review of the Japan Status of Forces Agreement, which has impacted citizens' daily lives, is an important issue that the Japanese and the U.S. governments must take responsibility for and address accordingly.

I would like all citizens of Japan to recognize that U.S. base issues are relevant not only to Okinawa but to them as well, and that every citizen is an involved party; issues surrounding U.S. military bases influence Japan's diplomacy, human rights, and environmental protection.

23 years after a previous referendum in 1996 on reviewing the Japan Status of Forces Agreement and reduction and consolidation of the U.S. bases, Okinawa Prefecture held its second prefectural referendum this past February, this time on the reclamation work off the Henoko coast. As a result, it has become clear that an overwhelming majority of people are against the reclamation.

Nevertheless, the Japanese central government's response in ignoring the result of the referendum and forcing construction at Henoko disrespects the will of the public which was derived through legitimate procedure and undermines local autonomy.

I strongly urge the central government to stand with Okinawa's majority public will and not cling to the idea that "Henoko is the only solution", and find a resolution through frank dialogue with Okinawa.

We strongly request eliminating the dangers posed by Marine Corps Air Station Futenma and the cancellation of its relocation to Henoko. Furthermore, I would like to stand with the people of Okinawa, of Japan, and of other countries under the shared respect for the dignity of democracy and solve these issues through deliberation and dialogue.

As we leave the imperial era of Heisei and enter the Reiwa era in Japan, if we look to the world we still see countries and regions which are under threat of regional conflict and terrorism due to religious and racial conflicts.

There have been many challenges such as poverty, refugee crises, famine, global environmental issues, and many more that threaten our lives and basic human rights.

On the other hand, with regards to the Korean peninsula, there have been signs of moving toward peace and problem-solving through dialogue between the two Koreas, and multiple summits between the United States and North Korea.

In order to achieve enduring peace, we members of international society must further our efforts towards mutual understanding, cooperation, and harmony.

Okinawa has a history as the Ryukyu Kingdom, which developed a sophisticated culture based on friendly trade and cultural exchange with neighboring countries as outlined by the principle of “*Bankoku Shinryo*”, a bridge between nations.

As a country that cherished peace and civility, it continuously developed its unique culture and identity.

By drawing on our foundations of Ryukyuan culture which has been passed down for generations and teaches us to have compassion for others, sharing Okinawa’s *Chimugukuru* – an open and benevolent heart – that aspires for peace, and accurately passing down the importance of peace to the next generation, we will further fulfill our role in realizing permanent peace together with the global community.

Today, we would like to express our deepest condolences to all the spirits who perished as a result of the Battle of Okinawa regardless of their nationality or race. We declare our determination to make utmost efforts to create a peaceful society of diversity and tolerance, a society in which dignity is protected for all and no one is left behind.

We must pass down Okinawa’s warm heart we call *Chimugukuru* and its spirit of peace, inherited from our ancestors, to our children and grandchildren.

We will endeavor to forge a secure world of everlasting peace.

I am determined to work together with the people of Okinawa.

June 23, 2019
Denny Tamaki
Governor of Okinawa Prefecture