

Peace Declaration

I reflect on the passage of 81 years.

On that day,

beneath the same relentless sun that shines upon us today,

in the pure darkness of a cave, where not a single ray of light could reach,
amidst shelling with no end in sight

or in suffering from malaria, contracted in the places they fled to,

more than 200,000 lives longed to live, yet were denied that chance.

Even today, throughout every nook and cranny of Okinawa, from east to west and from north to south, the memories of that tragedy remain.

Today, more than 90 percent of Okinawa's residents belong to generations that did not directly experience the Battle of Okinawa. Nevertheless, we Okinawans can still feel those days, described as hell on earth, as though they were our own experience, and renew our resolve never to allow such a tragedy to occur once again. The reason we are able to do so is none other than the long years of dedication of those who have continued, without hesitation, their acts of mourning and remembrance; those who, for the sake of future generations, passed on their harrowing experiences to their children and grandchildren and shared them in schools and local communities; and those who have continued to preserve the places where these tragedies unfolded.

We must never forget the tireless efforts of those who came before us in building these islands into the beautiful Okinawa we see today, from the devastation of 81 years ago, when it would not be an exaggeration to say that everything had been lost. However, extensive U.S. military bases still remain in Okinawa, and the excessive burden associated with those bases, together with the issues arising from them, continues to threaten human security. In particular, concerning Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, which remains unreturned even 30 years after the agreement was reached, we call

for a resolution through dialogue among the Japanese and U.S. governments and Okinawa Prefecture, rather than through unilateral imposition. Okinawa Prefecture will continue to advocate for the earliest return of Marine Corps Air Station Futenma and for the reduction of the excessive burden imposed by the U.S. military base burdens.

“Whenever we confront the reality of the Battle of Okinawa, we are reminded that there is nothing as brutal, nothing so steeped in degradation and misery, as war.”

These words open the “Concluding Message” displayed at the Okinawa Prefectural Peace Memorial Museum. Yet today, particularly in recent years, the international order has been shaken by unilateral attempts by major powers to alter the status quo through force. Such developments are fundamentally at odds with the aspirations of the people of Okinawa, and indeed of people around the world, who long for peace.

War is never someone else’s problem, even when it occurs somewhere far away. In today’s world, where economic and other ties among nations have become ever more closely intertwined, we are experiencing firsthand, whether we wish to or not, that military conflicts in other countries can have serious impacts on our lives, both directly and indirectly.

This year, the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons was held; however, it concluded without the adoption of an outcome document. In times when concerns over nuclear proliferation are growing, we must continue to call for peace and nuclear abolition with even greater determination. By rejecting war as a means to resolve disputes, opposing all forms of war, and pursuing solutions to challenges without resorting to war, we seek to achieve lasting peace, as described in the Constitution of Japan as the aspiration of the Japanese people, as well as nuclear abolition as a step toward that goal. This is not empty idealism; rather, it is a responsibility that we are called upon to undertake.

On this land of Mabuni, the Cornerstone of Peace stands. It was built upon philosophy of inscribing the names of all those who lost their lives in the Battle of Okinawa, regardless of nationality, whether friend or foe. Okinawa Prefecture also presents the Okinawa Peace Prize, now in its 13th edition, to honor those who have contributed to the building and maintenance of peace in the Asia-Pacific region. In addition, those engaged in community-based activities that contribute to peace within the prefecture are awarded with the Chura Uchina Grassroots Peace Contribution Award. Through these initiatives, Okinawa seek to pass on the indescribable experiences of the past and share the spirit of the “Heart of Peace” widely, both domestically and internationally. The commitment is indeed the responsibility of Okinawa to contribute to the realization of global peace.

Based on the realities and lessons of the Battle of Okinawa, as well as the accumulated body of research, Okinawa Prefecture will formulate a vision outlining the direction that we should take toward the 100 years since the end of the war to realize lasting peace and the establishment of human security.

We will continue to faithfully and responsibly pass on to future generations the events that took place on this land, while continuing to learn about and reflect on peace. In doing so, we will fulfill our role as a bridge for world peace, and establish a firm position as a hub for peace creation, international cooperation, and global contribution.

The tragic Battle of Okinawa, which claimed countless lives, remains deeply etched.

We remember the misery of war, and we vow to never repeat the folly.

Given the reality that even wars far from home impact our daily lives, to oppose all wars and realize peace is no ideal but responsibility.

Having borne the scars of war, it is Okinawa that can contribute to peace, as we hereby pledge to fulfill this role together with the rest of the world.

On this Memorial Day, I offer my deepest condolences to all those who lost their lives in the war. I hereby declare my commitment to peace, the rejection of war, and to the pursuit of a path beyond war, with the aim of building a future in which Okinawa contributes to lasting peace and the abolition of nuclear weapons throughout the world.

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Denny Tamaki

Governor of Okinawa Prefecture