

January 9, 2026

Submission of the Report by the Okinawa Prefectural Government in response to the call for input “Forever Chemicals (PFAS) & Human Rights”

Okinawa Prefectural Government

Preamble

The Okinawa Prefectural Government (OPG) wishes to extend our sincere gratitude for your work as Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Human Rights Council, investigating and reporting on the global issue of toxic substances and human rights.

We also deeply appreciate your submission of the report on "Military activities and toxics" and your efforts in voicing Okinawa's struggles with PFAS issues and the critical need for remediation at the UN General Assembly last year.

It is the OPG's mission to safeguard the lives of its residents. To achieve this, we continue to submit requests to the Government of Japan and the Government of the United States for base access as well as for preventative and remediation measures. In submitting this report, it is our earnest hope that Okinawa's unique and global problems will be addressed and shared by the international community.

Overview of Okinawa's PFOS issues

The Okinawa Prefectural Government (OPG), in its role as a regional government, has conducted surveys of PFOS across the prefecture, including Okinawa Main Island, Miyako and Yaeyama areas to understand more about the presence of these substances in the prefecture's environment.

The findings of these surveys show that PFOS and related chemical substances were detected at various locations in the prefecture, and high concentrations of PFOS exceeding the national standard value of 50ng/L were found around the US military bases.

OPG has formally applied to the US military for permission to conduct an on-site survey at US military installations to identify the source of contamination, and has requested the Japanese government to work with the US to provide OPG with access to the base for a survey, but permission has not been granted to date, which has caused great anxiety among local residents.

Following the report of April 2025 regarding the military presence in Okinawa and PFOS related issues, OPG hereby submits an updated status report concerning three military bases.

Kadena Air Station

At the Chatan Water Treatment Plant, operated by the Okinawa Prefectural Enterprise Bureau (OPEB), two of its water sources—the Hija River and the Kadena Well Group, both located near Kadena Air Base—have shown combined PFOS and PFOA concentrations exceeding the national standard of 50 ng/L.

Monitoring by OPEB so far has not detected high concentrations of PFOS in groundwater upstream from Kaden Air Base (35 ng/L maximum); however, high concentrations of PFOS have been found inside and downstream of the base, specifically at the Well Group inside the base (829 ng/l maximum) and at Dakujaku River (1,675 ng/L maximum) which flows through the base. Furthermore, downstream groundwater samples have recorded PFOS levels as high as 254 ng/L. Also, given the increased reading of PFOS in Hija River downstream from its confluence with Dakujaku River (608 ng/L maximum), it can be deduced that Kadena Air Station is the sole source of this contamination.

In August 2020, a local newspaper reported that firefighting training, using Aqueous Film Forming Foam (AFFF) containing PFOS, was regularly conducted from the 1970s to the 1980s at a former training site located inside Kadena Air Base. The same local newspaper also acquired documents through the US Freedom of Information Act indicating that the topography of the former training site was such that it directed the water flow towards Dakujaku River and nearby wells.

Futenma Air Station

Groundwater testing conducted upstream of Futenma Air Station did not indicate high concentrations of PFOS, 6:2FTS (PFOA, PFHxS), nor was any land use identified that could potentially cause such contamination. However, the groundwater samples from downstream of the Air Station revealed high concentrations of the same substances. These findings provide strong evidence that the source of contamination is indeed found inside the air station. There is also a strong possibility that the specific source site of PFOS, 6:2FTS (PFOA, PFHxS) contamination is the hanger and the firefighting training facility where the use of AFFF has been confirmed.

GOJ has stated that due to its extensive industrial and civilian use, it is difficult to substantiate the causal relationship between PFAS contamination with the US military. However, based on recent scientific surveys conducted between 2021 and 2024, which uncovered the contamination mechanism of one of the three basins inside the Air Station (Basin E), the OPG believes that a growing body of evidence substantiates the claim that Futenma Air Station is the source of PFOS (PFOA, PFHxS, 6:2FTS) contamination.

Camp Hansen

In June 2020, a water quality test conducted by the Kin Town Office (KTO) detected the presence of organic fluorine compounds, including PFOS, in the water sources around Camp Hansen. Of particular concern were the high concentrations (87-410 ng/L) of these substances found at water sources (groundwater) for Kin Water Treatment Plant and Namisato Water Treatment Plant. The test also revealed

readings of 50-70 ng/L in tap water from these water treatment plants. As a result, KTO suspended water intake from some of these groundwater sources in July 2020.

The groundwater system that forms the water source for Kin Town is quite intricate and complex, making it challenging to pinpoint the exact source of contamination. However, given the high concentrations of PFOS detected in rivers and water sources in the vicinity of Camp Hansen, it is probable that the base is the cause of the contamination. In December 2021, the OPG requested permission from US military authorities, via the Okinawa Defense Bureau, to access Camp Hansen to conduct a fact-finding investigation.

In February 2023, seeking to ensure the provision of safe water to residents, KTO suspended the use of all local water sources and instead began supplying drinking water provided by OPEB.

Switching the drinking water provider to OPEB temporarily solved the KTO's water contamination issues. On the other hand, OPG's request for an onsite investigation to identify the source of contamination has not yet been granted.

Negative impact of PFOS contamination on Okinawan residents: a human rights perspective

OPG hereby reports the detrimental impact of PFOS (and related substances) on residents living near US military bases. The presence of US military bases imposes a disproportionate burden on its residents because of prolonged PFOS related problems.

The high concentration of U.S. military bases in Okinawa, compared to other regions in Japan, imposes a disproportionate burden on its residents, notably prolonged issues related to PFOS contamination. The presence of PFOS in groundwater and rivers near these bases has negatively impacted various aspects of residents' lives.

Cultural Impact

First and foremost, the presence of PFOS in the environment undermines the cultural activities of local residents.

In the Okinawan dialect, "Ka" refers to rivers and natural springs which have historically provided domestic water for daily needs, including drinking and washing vegetables. Equally importantly, Ka held deep-rooted significance in Okinawan life and culture. Beyond being a vital water source, Ka was considered a sacred abode of the local deity and a place of worship. Water from Ka was indispensable for rite of passage rituals, such as "Wakamiji", the New Year purification ritual and "Ubumiji", the first bath given to a newborn.

Regrettably, many Ka located in proximity to military bases have suffered direct impacts from PFOS contamination.

In the areas around Futenma Air Station is home to number of springs, including Chunnaga Spring, which have for many generations provided domestic and ritual water for residents. However, due to high concentrations of PFOS detected at many of the springs, residents have become apprehensive about the water's safety.

One community around Kadena Air Station particularly affected by the contamination is the area near Yara Ubuga where the ceremony of newborn's first ritual bath, a long-standing tradition, has been discontinued due to the contamination.

In the areas around Camp Hansen, PFOS has been detected at Ukkaga, one of the Ka renowned as the "Spring of Longevity" and a registered cultural property of Kin Town, causing significant anxiety within the community.

The contamination of these Ka, historically indispensable to the nearby communities, is more than just an environmental issue. It carries serious implications for these communities by undermining their identity and negatively impacting the spirituality and sense of belonging among their members.

Furthermore, due to the detection of high concentrations of PFOS and other substances, parks and schools around the Futenma Air Station have banned the use of springs and ponds that are used as places for children to play in water and for environmental and historical education, which has had a major impact on education and the development of local pride.

Impact on the Living Environment of Residents

As an island prefecture, Okinawa lacks abundant water sources such as large rivers or lakes. Furthermore, because rainfall fluctuates significantly by year and season, the natural environment makes it difficult to secure a stable water supply. While the development of dams has improved the water situation and helped ensure a steady supply, the water sources around military bases remain vital resources for the prefecture.

Consequently, the presence of substances such as PFOS in groundwater and rivers near U.S. military Bases is not only adversely affecting the living environment of the Okinawan residents and military residents alike, but also imposes additional costs on the community in terms of securing safe drinking water.

The Kadena Well Group, located both inside and outside Kadena Air Base, along with the rivers in the Base's vicinity, serve as vital water sources for the prefecture. The detection of high concentrations of PFOS in these areas has become a major obstacle to the stable supply of safe tap water.

To mitigate these PFOS levels, OPG has invested heavily in installing specialized granular activated carbon filters with high adsorption capacity at the Chatan Water Treatment Plant. However, as the effectiveness of these filters diminishes over time, they require regular replacement and disposal at a high recurring cost. Despite OPG's repeated requests to GOJ for financial support to cover these expenses, the requests have been denied on the grounds that it is "difficult to definitively confirm a causal link" between U.S. military facilities and the detected PFOS.

If this situation persists, it is expected to lead to an increase in water bills of Okinawa residents, and there are concerns that Okinawa, a specific region where U.S. military bases are located, will continue to be adversely affected by PFOS and other substances over the long term in terms of maintaining the living environment.

Issues in the Japanese Legal System and Information Asymmetry

Furthermore, as addressing PFOS and other contaminants in Okinawa involves the U.S. military, appropriate responses from both the Japanese and U.S. governments are necessary. However, due to issues with the agreements concluded between the two governments and issues such as information asymmetry, which means that local residents are unable to obtain the information they need, appropriate responses have not been taken, and local residents will continue to bear health and environmental risks for the long term.

Recognizing the need to identify the sources of PFOS and other contaminants confirmed around U.S. military bases and to implement immediate countermeasures and improvements, OPG, under the 1973 Joint Committee Agreement, applied to the U.S. military for permission for prefectural and relevant municipal access to MCAS Futenma in February 2019, Kadena Air Base in May 2020, and Camp Hansen in December 2021. OPG has repeatedly requested the Japanese government and the U.S. military to allow access, but in December 2025, the U.S. military denied the requests. The process from application to response took more than six years, and no response was forthcoming for many years.

The response from the U.S. military also stated the following reasons for denial:

- Lack of established environmental standards that both Japan and the U.S. can mutually evaluate.
- Absence of clear scientific evidence (sample data) providing that U.S. facilities are the source of contamination.
- Missing data regarding specific water and soil sampling points for the proposed inspection.
- The claim that the situation has improved because OPEB decided to stop water intake from the Hija River, and Kin Town switched to alternative water supplies to ensure safety while it was not possible to investigate the source of contamination within the base.

The U.S. response contains numerous questionable points and ignores completed actions.

It is fundamentally contradictory for the U.S. to demand “scientific evidence” of their facilities being the source when the very purpose of the requested inspection is to obtain that evidence based on OPG’s high-probability findings. Furthermore, the “required level” of scientific evidence remains ambiguous.

Regarding the safety of tap water, the U.S. side cited two specific points: the suspension of water intake from the Hija River by OPEB and the transition of Kin Town’s water source to the prefectural supply. However, OPG must clarify the following facts: First, regarding OPEB, while it has implemented measures to reduce PFOS levels – such as suspending or restricting intake from Hija River and the Kadena wells since 2020 provided regional water supply is plentiful – there has been no formal decision to permanently cease water intake from these sources. Depending on future water demand and the progress of reconstruction work on the “East Line Conveyance Tunnel” (a critical infrastructure component), water shortages may occur. Consequently, it will remain necessary to draw water from the Hija River and Kadena Well Group as needed during the construction period to meet public demand.

Second, although water quality in Kin Town has improved following the switch to the OPEB's supply, it remains possible that the currently suspended groundwater sources will be required in the future, depending on fluctuations in water demand.

Furthermore, we cannot help having concerns over the extraordinary length of time taken to respond to our long-standing requests for on-site investigations. The prolonged delay raises serious doubts about whether coordination between the Japanese and U.S. governments was effectively conducted. OPG is currently scrutinizing the details of this response.

(Flaws in the Legal Framework)

Thus far, GOJ has stated that it will work with relevant ministries to urge the U.S. side to grant access. Regarding the PFOS issue, the government has explained that several frameworks for environmental cooperation exist, such as Japan-U.S. Joint Committee agreements and the Environmental Supplementary Agreement (ESA). They emphasize that the proper implementation of these frameworks is crucial to addressing the concerns of local residents. However, both these frameworks possess critical flaws.

Specifically, even in cases that adversely affect the health of local residents, the U.S. side is granted exclusive rights of administration over the management of bases. Under this system, site inspections are subject to U.S. approval. Even when a local municipality requests an inspection, the final decision rests with the local U.S. commander, and the United States is under no legal obligation to grant such requests.

Furthermore, ESA stipulates that Japanese authorities are permitted to enter U.S. bases in the event of an environmental accident (such as a spill or leakage). There have been several instances across Japan, including Okinawa, where such site inspections were conducted. However, challenges remain regarding the implementation of this agreement. For instance, the ultimate decision on whether to allow an inspection under the agreement still rests largely with the discretion of the U.S. forces.

Additionally, even when inspections are granted, they often take place only after the U.S. military has already removed contaminated water or soil. There have also been issues such as delays in the disclosure of sampling results. Moreover, a key condition for access under ESA is that an accident must have occurred. In the case of the three bases in Okinawa, the request for access was intended for investigating the source of PFOS contamination; therefore, this specific provision could not be invoked from the outset.

(Information Asymmetry)

Furthermore, while the U.S. military has exclusive management rights over its facilities and areas, this creates information asymmetry, preventing local governments from obtaining the information necessary to protect their health. For many years, Okinawa Prefecture has not received specific information about the bases, which are suspected sources of contamination, or about the status of coordination between the Japanese and U.S. governments.

The operations of U.S. forces in Japan and other matters are discussed between the Japanese and U.S. governments at the U.S.-Japan Joint Committee, which is composed of representatives from both governments. However, minutes and agreements are generally not made public, preventing the public from learning about the content of discussions and resulting in a lack of transparency. Furthermore, the U.S.-Japan Joint Committee is problematic in that it does not allow local governments to participate, and there is no mechanism in place to ensure that the opinions are reflected of residents and local governments in the surrounding areas, which will be most affected.

The fact that OPG directly requested on-site inspections from the U.S. side, but received no response from the U.S. for years, nor any concrete information from the Japanese government, underscores a persistent situation where the local community is unfairly excluded from decisions-making.

OPG's Position and Proposals

I. State Responsibility and Investigative Authority

OPG believes that GOJ, as the provider of facilities and areas for the U.S. forces, bears the primary responsibility for safeguarding the lives and health of its citizens. Therefore, we strongly urge GOJ to fulfill this obligation by conducting its own independent scientific investigations and effectively demonstrating the necessity of on-site access to the U.S. military to secure their authorization. Furthermore, we call for an immediate commencement of source identification inquiries and subsequent remedial actions.

II. Response to the Denial of Access and Future Engagement

Following the recent denial of access by the U.S. side, we intend to rigorously scrutinize the reasons provided for this refusal. We remain committed to presenting the U.S. military with the extensive scientific evidence accumulated to date, seeking their understanding, and persistently advocating for the realization of on-site investigations within the bases. Given that resolving the PFOS issue requires the proactive commitment of both nations, we demand a collaborative framework involving the relevant agencies of Japan, the United States, and local municipalities.

III. The Necessity of Reforming the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA)

The operations of U.S. forces in Japan are governed by the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), which outlines the use of facilities and areas as well as the status of U.S. personnel. Notably, SOFA has not undergone a single formal revision since its inception in 1960. Numerous flaws have been identified within the agreement, ranging from criminal jurisdiction to exclusive administrative rights over bases and inadequate responses to environmental contamination. As time progresses, the agreement has increasingly failed to meet the expectations and safety needs of the public. Therefore, OPG believes that a fundamental revision of SOFA is indispensable to resolving the chronic issues facing Okinawa which is strongly affected by the presence of U.S. forces in Japan.

To resolve issues such as PFOS, we believe it is necessary to add a new environmental clause to the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement. Specifically, the

U.S. military should minimize the impact on people, flora, fauna, soil, water, air, and cultural properties when formulating plans for facilities and areas. Furthermore, the U.S. military should periodically conduct surveys of the impact of projects based on such plans before and after their implementation and make the results public. Furthermore, we believe it is necessary to include specific provisions, such as the U.S. taking responsibility for appropriate remediation measures for any environmental contamination caused by U.S. military activities.

IV. Transparency and Public Accountability

Finally, we believe that certain results from past on-base surveys conducted by the Japanese and U.S. governments to date and the status of coordination between the two governments have not been made public. We call upon both the Japanese and U.S. governments to ensure full transparency by disclosing the progress of their discussions and the results of their investigations to local governments and to the public.

Conclusion

In this report, we have outlined the current situation regarding PFOS contamination in Okinawa, focusing on their adverse impacts on the residents and the measures being taken by OPG to ensure the safety and security of the local community.

We believe that fostering strong partnerships with relevant domestic and international organizations is vital to resolving these challenges. Should you have any questions or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

We sincerely appreciate your continued support and invaluable guidance as we work toward a sustainable and safe environment for all.

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