

Groups of the Okinawan Civil Society
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Okinawa, Japan

March 3, 2015

Lieutenant General John Wissler
Commanding General, III Marine Expeditionary Force
Commander, US Marine Forces Japan
Camp Courtney, Camp Foster
Okinawa, Japan

Lieutenant General Wissler:

We, groups of the Okinawan civil society, write to you and the U.S. military to express our condemnation and to demand a full explanation and justice regarding the arrest and detention of two Japanese civilians (Okinawan and Japanese) by the US military at Camp Schwab in Okinawa, Japan on February 22, 2015.

According to eyewitness accounts and media reports, Mr. Hiroji Yamashiro, Chairperson of Okinawa Heiwa Undo Center and Mr. Daigaku Tanimoto of Miyako Island, were at the main gate of Camp Schwab along with some forty individuals around at 9:00 am on that day. They were protesting against the construction of a US military base in Henoko and Oura Bay, Nago, Okinawa, Japan, exercising their rights to freedom of assembly, association, speech, and other forms of expression, ensured by Article 21 of the Japanese Constitution and Article 19 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights. The protest at Camp Schwab had just entered its 231st day since it began in July 2014 and an all Okinawa protest rally was scheduled to be held at Camp Schwab on the afternoon that day.

As the protesters became more eager, they began to move toward the “yellow line” at the gate, which has been drawn recently to mark the divide between the military base and Okinawa’s public land. Mr. Yamashiro instructed the

protesters to remain calm and stay behind the line. The protesters began to retreat while the Okinawa Prefectural Police on watch witnessed them doing so.

Then all of sudden, several private security guards under the control of the U.S. military rushed out from inside the base; they pushed and pulled Mr. Yamashiro down on the ground from behind; they dragged him by his feet into the military side of the yellow line. This action was taken while Mr. Yamashiro was urging the protesters not to cross the line. As he was facing the protesters, he had his back to the line, and could not see it.

Once on the US military side of the yellow line, the security guards handed Mr. Yamashiro to the U.S. military police and the US military police arrested him by handcuffing him behind his back.

Mr. Tanimoto tried to rescue Mr. Yamashiro, but he was also arrested by US military police in a similar manner, being dragged down and handcuffed behind his back.

Mr. Yamashiro and Mr. Tanimoto were then taken to a building on Camp Schwab for interrogation. The US military police apparently told them through an interpreter that they were arrested for violation of the US-Japan Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). They were detained in separate rooms for the next three hours. Both Mr. Yamashiro and Mr. Tanimoto exercised their rights to remain silent during interrogation.

Later that day, Mr. Yamashiro and Mr. Tanimoto were transferred from Camp Schwab to the Nago Police Station. There they also were also arrested and detained by the Okinawa prefectural police. According to a police officer at the Nago station quoted in the Okinawa Times (Feb. 24, 2015), once both men were handed from US military to the Nago station, “(the Okinawa prefectural police) had no choice, but arrested them” because of the SOFA.

The next day, on February 23, Mr. Yamashiro and Mr. Tanimoto were taken to the Naha District Prosecutors Office for interrogation. The prosecutors office decided not to request further detention of them for reasons the prosecutors office was quoted as saying “(it) cannot disclose” (Kyodo News Feb. 23, 2015). Mr.

Yamashiro and Mr. Tanimoto were returned to the Nago Police Station where they were released later that day.

All the while, the US military did not provide the Okinawan public with any official explanation regarding the arrest and detention of Mr. Yamashiro and Mr. Tanimoto. However, according to the Okinawa Times (Feb. 25, 2015), Joseph W. King, Camp Director at Camp Schwab reported to a delegation from the Special Committee on Okinawa and Northern Problems (House of Councilors) who were visiting Okinawa that the arrest and detention were made in accordance with “a directive from a superior.”

We believe that the arrest and detention of Mr. Yamashiro and Mr. Tanimoto by the US military were unnecessary and unjustified; the arrest and detention violated the rights of Mr. Yamashiro and Mr. Tanimoto to freedom of expression ensured by the Japanese Constitution and the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights.

We believe that in arresting and detaining Mr. Yamashiro and Mr. Tanimoto, the US military overstepped its authority stipulated by agreements between Japan and U.S. We believe that the arrest and detention of the two Japanese individuals by the US military constitute an intentional threat and attempt to intimidate the democratic voice of the people of Okinawa and the protest movement of Okinawa against the construction of the military base in Henoko and Oura Bay.

We cannot believe it was a coincidence that Mr. Yamashiro was arrested just a few hours before he was scheduled to chair an all-Okinawa protest rally to be held just a few meters from the place of arrest.

We condemn the U.S. military’s arrest and detention of Mr. Yamashiro and Mr. Tanimoto.

We demand that the US military provide a full explanation of why and how, in the chain of command, these decisions were made and these actions were taken in the arrest and detention of Mr. Yamashiro and Mr. Tanimoto.

We demand that the U.S. military make necessary decisions and take necessary actions to redress the injustice and violation inflicted by the U.S. military upon Mr. Yamashiro and Mr. Tanimoto.

We demand that the U.S. military understand and respect that the democratic voice of the people of Okinawa is against the construction of the US military base in Henoko and Oura Bay.

We demand that the U.S. military understand and respect our rights to freedom of assembly, association, speech and other forms of expression ensured by the Japanese Constitution and the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights.

Sincerely yours,

Okinawa Heiwa Shimin Renrakukai
The Conference Opposing Heliport Construction
Okinawa Heiwa Undo Center
No Heliport Base Association of 10 Districts North of Futamai
Tida no kai
Nuchidu Takara Forum
Okinawa Peace Constitution League/Article 9
Uruma City Gushikawa Peace Constitution League/Article 9
Okinawa Women Act Against Military Violence
Haebaru Peace Guides Party
Okinawa Peace Walking Committee
Half Century Miyamori
Inochio Mamoru Naichingeru no kai
Okinawa han no hi no kai
Okinawan and Korean Solidarity Group Against US Military Bases
New Wave To Hope
No Helipad Takae Residents Society
Okumagawa Basin Protection Found
Association to Promote Ryukyu Islands as World Natural Heritage
Okinawa Environmental Network

Dugong Protection Found
Dugong Network Okinawa
Association to Protect Northernmost Dugong
Save the Dugong Campaign Center
Minshuku Yaponeshia
The Save Awase Higata Association
Haha Broccoli
WETLAND FORUM
The Voice of Gifu Citizens for saving Peace, Human rights and Environment
Citizens' Network for Biodiversity in Okinawa

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CC: U.S. President, Barack Obama
U.S. Secretary of Defense, Ash Carter
U.S. Pacific Command Commander, Adm. Samuel J. Locklear III
U.S. Forces Japan Commander, Lt. Gen. Salvatore A. "Sam" Angelella
U.S. Ambassador to Japan, Caroline Bouvier Kennedy

Okinawa Prefecture Governor, Takeshi Onaga
Okinawa Prefectural Assembly Chair, Masaharu Kina
Nago City Mayor, Susumu Inamine
Nago City Assembly Chair, Minoru Yabiku

United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon
United Nations Human Rights Council President, Joachim Rucker

Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe
Minister of Foreign Affairs, Fumio Kishida
Minister of Defense, Gen Nakatani
Minister of State for Okinawa and Northern Territories Affairs,
Shunichi Yamaguchi

Media outlets