

Hon. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan

Hon. Gen Nakatani, Minister of Defense

Hon. Aiko Shimajiri, Minister of State for Special Missions (Okinawa and Northern Territories Affairs)

Hon. Koichiro Nakajima, Director General of the Okinawa Defense Bureau

### **Forcible Resumption of the Construction of US Military Helipads in the Northern Training Area near the Village of Higashi, Okinawa is a Human Rights Violation**

The Catholic Church believes that human authority must not go beyond the limits willed by God, and that Christ is the victorious Lamb who overcomes every power that would make itself absolute (Cf. Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 382).

The construction of six helipads has been underway in the Northern Training Area near Takae, Higashi village, Okinawa since 2007. Two of the six helipads have already been completed, and take-off and landing training and low altitude flying training are practiced regardless of day or night. Takae village residents have persistently protested against the construction of helipads (Osprey-pads) while their peaceful lives have been threatened by infrasonic sound and the high accident rate of Ospreys. The construction process had been suspended for these two years due to their protests.

However, at six o'clock on the morning of July 11, the day after the Upper House election, approximately 100 riot police and 20 private security agents rushed into this small village of fewer than 160 residents and started moving construction material and equipment into the area.

Police and riot task forces mobilized from outside the prefecture afterward increased the number to 500. Prefectural Road 70 near the site was closed and checkpoints were put in place in order to remove citizen protesting against the construction. Tents, equipment and vehicles placed on the road by protestors were removed and confiscated. In such a forcible manner construction was resumed on July 22.

During this period, local residents and protesters from outside scuffled fiercely with the police, and injured persons were taken to a hospital.

In reaction to this abrupt assault-like resumption of construction and the mobilization of a large number of police and riot squads, on July 21 the Okinawa Prefectural Assembly adopted a resolution demanding a halt to the helipad construction.

We, the Japan Catholic Council for Justice and Peace, also believe that these successive incidents are grave human rights violations because they terrify local residents and unfairly infringe upon their freedom of assembly, association and expression which are the rights guaranteed to the nation by the Constitution of Japan. We entirely agree with the resolution of the Okinawa Prefectural Assembly and demand that the government and the Okinawa Defense Bureau respond to the demand of the prefectural assembly and local residents and halt the construction immediately.

In addition, we hereby declare that we agree to the demands in the resolution announced on July 21, 2016, by the Okinawa Prefectural Assembly, “Resolution of Protest Against the Incident of Disposing the Body of a Woman Allegedly Committed by a Civil Employee of the U.S. Military, a Former Marine Corps Personnel”, especially the demand; “Withdraw the US Marine Corps from Okinawa and significantly consolidate and reduce the US military bases on Okinawa”. We strongly demand that the Japanese government respond to the demands of the Okinawa Prefectural Assembly and realize the full-scale withdrawal of the US Marine Corps, which carries out Osprey training, from Okinawa as soon as possible.

July 28, 2016

Bishop Bernard Taiji Katsuya

Chairman, Japan Catholic Council for Justice and Peace

Notes:

“Resolution of protest by the Okinawa Prefectural Assembly concerning helipad construction around the Northern Training Area in Higashi village of Okinawa” July 21, 2016 (in Japanese)

<http://www.pref.okinawa.jp/site/gikai/documents/2806heriikennsho.pdf>

“Resolution of Protest Against the Incident of Disposing the Body of a Woman Allegedly Committed by a Civil Employee of the U.S. Military, a Former Marine Corps Personnel” May 26, 2016 (in English)

<http://www.pref.okinawa.jp/site/gikai/documents/28526beigunzoku.pdf>