

# People's security: Okinawa's anti-bases movement

## Introduction

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In June–July 2000 Okinawa was in an unusual excitement, unusual in that it was mixed. The G8 summit of the year was descending on this small island of 1.2 million, known for the decades long people's struggle against the largest overseas concentration of US military bases. Pro-military base Governor Yonamine and his prefectural establishment, along with local business circles, seemed proud of hosting this global event of power, urging all Okinawans to 'cooperate for the success of the summit'. Banners with this slogan and the G8 national flags decorated all the main streets and buildings. The venue of the summit was politically, and provocatively, chosen. Nago City where the G8 leaders were to meet was exactly where a new US marine base was being imposed despite strong island-wide opposition. Thirty thousand police were mobilized to Okinawa, inundating the whole island.

On the other hand, Okinawa became the host of numerous counter-summit and international fora, conferences, festivals, and other people's events, unprecedented in number and variety in Okinawa's history. More than ten international gatherings, large and small, were held one after the other, and some even simultaneously, with the backing of the local grassroots movement coalition for peace. These events ranged from the Okinawa women-initiated conference on the redefinition of security and an international forum on people's security, through an environment forum and the Jubilee 2000 conference to a Moon Light Festival held simultaneously in Okinawa and Korea. The

culmination was the 20 July mobilization of 27 000 people from Okinawa and mainland Japan, joined by activists of various types from the five continents participating in different international events. The demonstrators completely encircled the huge Kadena Airbase with a human chain to show their will against the base and for peace.

Some overseas NGOs expected a Seattle type confrontational situation, where G8 is brought to serious tasks, but that did not happen. Rather, what happened was, it seems to me, a serious rethinking and reorienting process accompanied by effective networking across borders stimulated by new encounters and an exchange of views.

The Okinawa International Forum on People's Security, held from 29 June through 1 July jointly by the Bangkok-based Focus on Global South and the Tokyo and Okinawa coalition of peace groups, was a fresh intellectual and activist effort to address the post-Cold War situation, taking inspiration from the bold autonomous initiatives of the two Kims in the Korean peninsula two weeks earlier, toward peace and national reunification. The forum was held with 'organic' linkages with other G8 summit-countering events, in particular with the Women's Summit against militarism in East Asia, which originated in 1995 with an impetus following the rape of a 12 year old girl by US soldiers, and which met for the third time, to redefine security from a gender perspective

The people's security forum was a medium-sized conference of 130 activists and action-oriented intellectuals, including 30

from overseas, from Korea, mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Pacific islands, and the United States.

The conceptual thrust of the forum was to redefine security as 'people's security,' a concept distinguished both from 'national (state) security' and 'human security' invented by the United Nations Development Program. This was not an abstract theme, particularly at a time when the US and Japan, after 1995, 'redefined' their security alliance to justify, and even strengthen, it after the loss of the potential enemy. 'People's security' is not abstract because it is also embedded in the historical experience of the Okinawan people, who knew that the military – Japanese or American – never protected the people.

The forum examined the nature of the reorganization of US hegemony in the post-Cold War era, and the interrelatedness between the US global military strategy and the neo-liberal economic globalization processes, and it discussed how social movements should formulate and share a common position vis-à-vis this complex power structure that integrates socio-economic, environmental, cultural, gender, and military aspects. In this comprehensive approach, the forum set five topics: (I) Okinawa: Struggle against Militarism and Human Dignity; (II) US Strategy & Globalization; (III) War and Colonial Legacies; (IV) Regional Mechanisms for Peace; and (V) People's Security and Alternative Practices. The Okinawa declaration adopted by the forum formulated people's security in the following words:

State security contradicts people's security. The military doesn't protect people, it destabilizes societies. We work to create people's security clearly differentiated from the security of the state by coming together, building alliances beyond borders of race, religion, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, economic and social status, and transforming the structures that perpetuate and sustain injustices and inequalities. People themselves, particularly those socially oppressed and suffering from lack of security, are the main actors in creating

people's security so they can live in justice without fear and anxiety. People's security is based on human rights, gender justice, ecological justice, and social solidarity. It calls for demilitarization. Our means to achieve it is non-violent.

The forum's approach was recognized as relevant to the Okinawan realities as well as the Asian and Pacific realities where the military and its role in internal conflicts are serious security dangers to the people. One indication of this was that the forum was unexpectedly prominently reported by two major local newspapers, the *Ryukyu Shimpo* and the *Okinawa Times*. The latter editorially introduced the people's security concept as a new concept 'hammered out by the people in Okinawa and elsewhere' and 'it tells us that the status quo of Okinawa with the presence of bases should not be considered fateful. It can be changed.' (6 July)

Asked how they found the conference, most participants said it was 'meaty' with rich substance but time was short for full discussions. New angles of looking at things were introduced, and certainly the significance of the conference will be determined by the follow-up in the form of joint struggles and a conceptual deepening. Of the 20 presentations made under the five agenda items, we print here three for sharing. (A full report will be published soon; and inquiries on this should be made to ppsg@jca.apc.org.)

### Author's biography

MUTO Ichiyo 武藤一羊 was born in 1931. He is a writer on political and social affairs, and has been engaged actively in the anti-war movement and other social movements since the 1950s. He is the author of 10 books, including *Critique of the Dominant Structures* (1970), *Base and Culture* (1975), *Unmasking the Japanese State* (1984), *Reinstating Political Thought* (1988), *Visions and Realities* (1998), and *Problematising the Postwar Japanese State* (1999). He has been teaching at the sociology department of the State University of New York at Binghamton since 1983. He is the founder of the Pacific Asia Resource Center and is currently co-president of the People's Plan Study Group based in Tokyo.