

THE INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT AGAINST ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AND RACISM

IMADR Oral Statement: 33rd session of the Human Rights Council
Item 4: General Debate

19 September 2016

Thank you Mr. President,

Together with the All Okinawa Council for Human Rights, IMADR, Franciscans International and Human Rights Now would like to draw this Council's attention to the human rights situation in Ryukyu/Okinawa, Japan. The Okinawa islands host about three quarters of the U.S. military's exclusive-use facilities in Japan. The large presence of the foreign military has caused a countless number of human rights violations for decades, including sexual violence against women and girls, environmental destruction, land grabbing and forced displacement. Yet, victims' access to justice remains limited. Despite the persistent opposition from the people of Ryukyu/Okinawa, the Government of Japan has been advancing the plans to construct new U.S. military facilities in Henoko and Takae.

In this April, the Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression shared his specific concern regarding "*disproportionate restrictions on protest activity*" and "*the use of force against journalists*" in Okinawa.¹ Yet, the Government has continued to employ oppressive measures including forced evacuation and temporarily detention of sit-in protesters by an excessive number of riot police officers.

Furthermore, in May, it was revealed that a security company contracted by the Defence Bureau had compiled a list of 60 protesters including leading environmental human rights defenders and peace activists in order to monitor and report their protest activity in Henoko. Since the list contained personal information of protesters which was not publicly available, the Defence Bureau and police forces were suspected of involvement. We regret that not only the Government denied its involvement, but also they announced that no investigation to the incident will be conducted.

Moreover, we are alarmed by the report that on 20th August journalists were prevented from reporting the scene of protest in Takae. Press freedom is under threat in Okinawa. High ranking government officials and law makers have repeatedly made repressive comments against the two major local newspapers in Okinawa. However, most of those comments have not been condemned by the Government, and no specific action has been taken to protect press freedom. We call upon the Government of Japan to fully respect the freedom of expression in Okinawa including the rights to information and privacy.

Thank you Mr. President.

¹ UN Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Preliminary observations at the end of his visit to Japan (12-19 April 2016), <http://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=19842&LangID=E>