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A Nago Citizen's Opinion on the Henoko Marine Base Construction Project 辺野古海兵隊基地建設に関する一名護市民の意見

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This is the second in a five part series: [Again Okinawa: Japan-Okinawa-US Relations in a Time of Turmoil](#)

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•Gavan McCormack, [Introduction: The Continued Saga of the Henoko Base and Japan-US-Okinawa Relations](#)

•Sakurai Kunitoshi, [If the Law is Observed, There Can be No Reclamation: A Mayoral Opinion Endorsed by Citizens of Nago and Okinawans](#)

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To Mayor Inamine,

Nago City

Self-Introduction

I write as a resident of Kushi district, the site for the planned construction of a Futenma Replacement Facility (the projected Henoko base). Ever since it first surfaced I have been struggling against the plan for construction of a base that would foreclose the future of the children of the district. I am joint representative of the "Association of the 10 Districts North of Futami Who Do Not Want a Base" (formed by the residents of those 10 districts in October 1997) and General Secretary of the "Association of Women Supporting the Inamine City Government" (commonly known as "Inagu Association") formed in April 2010. As an investigator for the project to compile Nago City's History, I have been involved in an oral history project into the nature-rooted daily life and history and culture of this region, in particular of the Kushi district. I am also a member of the "Northern Limits Dugong Investigation Team" and I participate in the Okinawa Citizen's Biodiversity Network.

General Stance

For 17 years, without letup, I have been opposing the construction of a base at Henoko. The citizens of Nago, including the residents of my district, warding off all the pressures applied by the government, carried out a citizen referendum in December 1997 that plainly showed our resolve to say "No" to the Base that had suddenly descended on our quiet backwater. Despite this, our district has been riven by "carrot and stick" policies carried out by a government determined to foist the base upon us come what may, dividing parents and children, family members and relatives, and rupturing human relations that once were warm and close. In inverse proportion to the new facilities built with Ministry of Defense subsidy, local small-scale businesses lapsed into bankruptcy and Nago's remoteness and backwardness deepened.

However, in 2010, realizing that base-related monies had neither enriched their lives or opened any future for the region, residents and citizens chose as mayor Inamine Susumu (a native of Mihara district) who pledged "not to allow any base to be built, whether on land or on sea." We take great pride in the Inamine city government for responding to the will of citizens and consistently opposing the base project, especially "for the sake of the future of our children." That is because we believe that what we adults must bequeath to our children and grandchildren is nature and peace. That is the responsibility of those who live today.

Even in the Districts north of Futami, on the part of residents whose lives had been torn apart by the base problem, a mood of unified resolve to promote our region was born. Steps in the direction of an independence that did not rely on base-related money earned the support of the city and eventually began to come on track so we could look to the future with great hope. We cannot help being consumed with anxiety that reclamation of the bay and construction of a base would bring these efforts to nought, dividing the region once again so that our days would be spent in a nightmare of anxiety.

In our seafront tent, on days of blazing heat or with cold winds sometimes blowing, we have maintained, and continue to this day to maintain, our occupation, joined by people of good will from throughout Okinawa and Japan, and from all parts of the world, who have fought side by side with us against the unjust and violent imposition of environmental investigation by the Ministry of Defense. Despite from time to time feeling isolation and helplessness, driving off the despair that threatened to engulf us, our efforts bore fruit in keeping the flame of "opposition to the base" alive and unextinguished. It is to the great happiness

and hope of us local residents that an "all-Okinawan" "No" to base construction movement has been plainly established, which includes even the Okinawan prefectural association of the Liberal Democratic Party, the current ruling national party. Nevertheless, we find it hard to contain our deep anger that the government has ignored these developments, brushing them aside and proceeding by force to the point of requesting that the Governor authorize reclamation works, which is the final stage preparatory to construction. Such strong opposition (hostility) on the part of Okinawans is exemplified by Governor Nakaima saying "Base substitution outside Okinawa would be faster." As a result, even after 17 years the government has not been able to hammer in a single exploratory peg. It remains fundamentally impossible to implement its plan to construct the base.

The Governor, in his response to the environmental assessment on the Henoko Base construction project, declared clearly that it would be "impossible to protect the livelihood environment and the natural environment." It goes without saying that he should make a judgement of "non-allowance" of the reclamation in response to the present request for reclamation based on the Environmental Impact (EI) report, for the sake of the residents of the district, the livelihood of Okinawans and to protect the natural environment that is an Okinawan precious treasure to be handed onto future generations.

However, of late the Abe government has been desperately attempting to press ahead with the Henoko transfer, striving to shift the Governor by sending a succession of cabinet ministers on pilgrimage to Okinawa and making a great fuss over development policies, or by conducting secret meetings with Okinawan supporters of the transfer project. We cannot help feeling profound unease at such movements.

In these circumstances, we appraise highly the Okinawan prefecture's inquiry to the Nago City mayor inquiring of his opinion and Nago City's widely canvassing the opinions of citizens and people originating in the city in order to reflect them in his mayoral statement. This "citizen perspective" is the true strength of the Inamine city government. Believing that the Nago mayor's opinion will constitute strong backing for the Governor to decide on "non-allowance of the reclamation" and so supporting it, below I set out my views on a number of points.

1) On the "Statement of Reasons as to why Reclamation is Necessary"

The matter goes back to the idea of returning Futenma Airport (the "world's most dangerous base") in order to reduce at least a little the burden deriving from the excessive weight of the bases on Okinawa. The Futenma base is one that was constructed illegally on village or agricultural lands whose residents had taken refuge at the time, which had been seized by the US forces who had landed in Okinawa in April 1945; it should be unconditionally returned. The notion of "transfer [of Futenma] within Okinawa is extremely unjust and improper and amounts to increasing rather than diminishing the burden, and the fact that the chosen transfer site, Cape Henoko, is one that according to Okinawa's "Guidelines for Environmental Protection" should be given the highest ranking as "calling for the strictest environmental protection," makes it even more unjust and improper.

Military analysts have already raised serious doubts about the deterrence value of the US Marine Corps and about Okinawa's importance in geographic terms. Reinforcing military strength is out-dated, and the trend in international society is henceforth for the exercise of diplomatic strength by engaging in discussion, not for the construction of international relations through military force. Bases, and areas occupied by armies, are the most dangerous places, and it is the bitter lesson of the Battle of Okinawa from which survivors continue to suffer today that armies do not protect people, but cause great bloodshed. Those with experience of the Battle of Okinawa feel a growing sense of crisis that the construction of a new military base at Henoko might raise Asian tensions even higher and lead to a repeat of the catastrophe of war on these islands.

Furthermore, Okinawans know deep in their bones that base transfer within Okinawa would not "lessen the burden" and that, when governments of Japan or the United States talk of "burden lessening" it is just so much words. When governments of Japan or the United States talk of their "maximum concern for the natural realm and for the living environment" at the projected site they treat us residents of the area as stupid, since it is clear that both the natural environment and the human livelihood environment would be radically changed. I cannot contain my anger at this.

The agreement between former Nago mayor Shimabukuro Yoshikazu and the national government on the construction of a "V"-shaped coastal design is taken to be a definitive mark of Nago acceptance. But he was elected mayor in 2006 on an "opposition to a coastal design" pledge, so this is plainly a breach of that pledge. He betrayed the citizens of Nago. Such an agreement is counter to the wishes of the citizens of Nago. The will of the people of Nago was made clear in the citizen referendum of 1997 and, as many opinion polls have shown, that will remains unchanged today.

The "Reasons Why Reclamation is Necessary" or the reasons why base construction is necessary, are all bankrupt. What we citizens want is a base-free, peaceful, and nature-rich Okinawa." There absolutely cannot be any "need" for reclamation or for base construction.

2) On the Destruction of Nature and Responsibility to Generations Unborn

The natural environment is the basis for human life and we cannot live if it is destroyed. We who live today have no right to destroy the basis of livelihood for future generations.

Elderly Nago citizens who managed to survive the Battle of Okinawa say, "The sea is the giver of life and those who would sell the land for bases should be punished." To the Defense Agency officials who came to "urge" base construction they responded, "if you must construct a base, then kill us first."

The experience of raising children, nurturing life with the fruits of the sea after the land had been devastated by war, sustained in those women and men two fundamental beliefs, the strong sense that the misery of the battlefield should never again be visited upon their children and grandchildren and a deep gratitude towards the sea, or nature. It is our responsibility to bequeath to future generations the richness of Cape Henoko that still brings colour to their cheeks as they speak of it, and its fruits. To permit its destruction would, I believe, constitute a crime against generations unborn.

We adults must assure our children of an even better natural environment and livelihood environment and we must bear a responsibility for our children's future. Reclamation would inevitably mean destruction of nature and an increase in noise, accidents, and incidents caused by US soldiers accompanying the "base construction," thus greatly changing the livelihood environment. The educational environment of children would also be damaged and it would become impossible for us adults to carry out our responsibility. Above all, I fear that construction of the new Henoko base will serve as an invitation to war and our children and grandchildren will again find themselves wandering on to the battlefield.

The above paragraphs state my reasons why, in consideration of responsibility to generations yet unborn, we must not allow reclamation or base construction. "Peace" and "nature" are precisely the conditions for human beings to live healthily and must be passed on from generation to generation.

3) Concerning Nature and Livelihood in Henoko and on Oura Bay

It is no exaggeration to say that nature in Okinawa has suffered greatly from the Battle of Okinawa, from post-war base construction and from post-reversion, rampant development policies. The US military that occupied the islands after their reduction to scorched earth in the land fighting forcibly constructed the bases at point of "bayonet and bulldozer," brooking no dissent and causing destruction of nature and environment. This is because, post-reversion and counter to the wishes of Okinawans, the bases were steadily reinforced and because a level of destruction of nature said to be even greater than that caused by the "storm of iron" during the Battle of Okinawa was caused by excessive development under high-level subsidy and development policies adopted as compensation for having the bases.

In this situation, because of its preservation of mountain, river, and sea interconnectedness, the Oura bay zone is an exceptionally important place. Seven rivers, including especially the Oura and the Teima, carry nutrients from the forests into Oura Bay. A continuous ecology links each system and its diverse life forms, from the river-mouth mangrove forests to the wetlands, sea grass and laver fields and coral reef.

Furthermore, the seaweed and laver fields, feeding grounds of the dugong, that extend through the Henoko coastal area and are said by researchers to be Okinawa Island's largest and richest, are the core living zone of the endangered northern limit dugong. Based on such nature, our ancestors in this region built a lifestyle and culture. The oldest remains found to date in this district, the Umuibaru and Abe shell heap middens on Cape Henoko are estimated to date to between 2,200 and 800 years ago, the late Okinawa shell midden era. The Umuibaru remains are in a site that would be destroyed if the projected new base was to go ahead.

There are many traditional shrine rites and rituals that have been preserved in this district from ancient times. I think this is related to the fact that nature remains. Traditional rites and rituals are deeply connected to mode of production and livelihood and include rites of thanks and invocations to the gods of sea and mountain – to nature – that sustain it.

In this way, the nature and biodiversity of Henoko and Oura Bay has sustained the lives and livelihood and culture of the people living in the coastal region. Construction of a new base is completely unacceptable because it would destroy all of this.

4) On the Landfill for the Reclamation

(a) The Henoko dam vicinity is said to be the projected site for extraction of landfill for the reclamation, but according to the 2011 investigation of cultural properties in the Henoko dam vicinity carried out inside Camp Schwab base as part of the Nago City Education Committee's detailed study of archaeological remains within the city, various remains were identified that were thought to be those of roads, stone walls and ditches probably built for drainage, reckoned to date from the Yatori settlement era.

There may be cases when facilities or works are conducted for public welfare and regional development in which it is enough just to preserve the records of cultural properties, but US military bases are a completely different matter. They can only be considered a threat to local residents and harmful to the district. It would be extremely improper for important cultural properties left by our ancestors in this region to be lost for the sake of extracting landfill for reclamation to construct a base.

Furthermore, the ecology of the Henoko dam vicinity contains many wetland plant species that, within the Yambaru region, are to be seen only in Onna village and Nago City and, according to the Environmental Appraisal Investigation Committee of Okinawa Prefecture, a sense of crisis attaches to the endangered *Nagabaarinotougusa* [*Haloragis micrantha*] a grass so rare that it might be considered the "dugong of the land" (according to the Committee's Yokota Masashi of Ryukyu University, it might already be extinct).

Henoko dam is also an important catchment area for local communities. Significant deleterious effects would be inevitable if landfill was taken from here. Nago City's position is that it will not permit the use of city lands in the vicinity of Henoko dam, but landfill extraction should not be allowed even from privately owned lands.

(b) As for the extraction of landfill from the vicinity of Okinawa island, already various ill-effects such as shrinkage of beaches, erosion, changes in the configuration of lagoon bottoms, deterioration of ecology, have resulted from uncontrolled extraction. Local residents have a sense of crisis about this. Even if it were for the sake of industry I do not think that any further extraction should be allowed here, and the case is so much stronger when it concerns extraction for purposes of reclamation in order to construct a base.

I am a member of the "Northern Limit Dugong Investigation Team" that has been active in the preservation of the living environment of endangered dugong, a national monument surviving in the vicinity of Okinawa Island. We are concerned at the deleterious effects on seagrass beds caused by sand extraction, since the sandy sea floor near the coast is the site of seagrass beds which are the unique food of the dugong. (It goes without saying that seagrass beds would be lost if marine currents are altered by reclamation and the erection of large structures in the sea.)

It is a matter of particular concern that the projected site for landfill extraction is on the dugong's perambulatory route. The dugong is a very sensitive creature, which dislikes contact with human activity. Ever since the marine disturbance to do with the Bowling study carried out in 2004 in the Henoko vicinity, they have tended to keep away from it even though till then it had been their largest and best feeding grounds. It could be said that it was the forceful prosecution of its activities, including the environmental impact study, by the Defence Agency (now the Department of Defense) that drove the dugong away.

There is a concern that the noise and disturbance to the marine environment caused by soil extraction and transport would disrupt their life and ecology and further worsen their living environment.

(c) Purchasing landfill is also very problematic. In order to avoid the EI process, the government referred to the use of purchased soil and sand, but in many districts the ill-effects on the environment caused by the extraction of soil and especially sand are problematic. Local residents are strongly opposed and, as is evident in the fact that the documents attached to the request for reclamation do not specify the site of extraction, it will not be easy to obtain. Even if they can secure it, the problem of introduced species contained in the introduced landfill, especially in that brought in from sites with an ecology completely different to sub-tropical Okinawa, would create a system disruptive crisis. It would also be in contravention of the Government of Japan (Department of the Environment)'s policies to seek registration of Okinawa as a World Natural Heritage site.

In connection with purchase of landfill, it is also impossible to dismiss concern over nuclear waste pollution from the Fukushima nuclear plant accident. To the extent that questions such as the site for extraction, its ecology, the contents of its soil and sand, whether soil or sand from other sites might be included, are not made clear, what kind of investigation and checking has been done, whether it is possible to avoid introduced species and harmful substances, importation of soil and sand from foreign countries must not be permitted.

5) On the Nago Fishing Cooperative's General Meeting

Many parts of the minutes of the March 11 Nago Fishing Cooperative's special general meeting that consented to the reclamation of Cape Henoko [by a 94:2 vote] have been blackened out [in the documents publicly posted by Okinawa prefecture]. That is in breach of the spirit of the public notification and consultation process (*kokuji juran*) designed to seek widest publication of information and, even if there had been a request for confidentiality from the Fishing Coop, it was not in accord with the public interest for that request to be met.

There are quite a few members of the Nago Fishing Coop in our district and we know that especially those of the east coast have grave doubts about the base construction.¹ The fact is that many of them worry as to whether they can continue making a living as fishermen and are tortured over the fact that they want to oppose but cannot go against the current in the organization. I would guess that very few of them gave their "consent" positively.

The Okinawan fishing industry has suffered greatly from the direct damage caused by red soil runoff pollution from the construction of bases during the US occupation period and from rampant development since reversion, and it suffers recurrent harm from incidents and accidents in the coastal zone provided to the US military. The serious problem henceforth is to reveal the process that is driving the Okinawan fishermen to the point of having reluctantly to accept compensation to go with reclamation and of taking back the sea so that fishermen can make a living as fishermen and can cultivate their successors. For that reason too, reclamation and base construction, that would deliver a major blow to the sea and fisheries, must be stopped.

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Author Urashima, at the Henoko tent, October 2008

Urashima is a local Nago City writer and environmentalist, involved from the outset in 1997 in the movements opposing the construction of a new military complex in Henoko. On the occasion of the previous, 2010, election, the Asia-Pacific Journal also translated an Urashima article ("[Electing a town mayor in Okinawa: Report from the Nago trenches](#)," 25 January 2010). She is the major chronicler and historian-participant of struggles in Northern Okinawa during the past two decades, author of a series of books and articles on them (in Japanese). For a brief note by Urashima on her thinking, see Gavan McCormack and Satoko Oka Norimatsu, *Resistant Islands: Okinawa Confronts Japan and the United States*, Rowman and Littlefield, 2012, pp. 243-248.

Translation by Gavan McCormack

Notes

¹ Translator Note: Five days after the Henoko meeting, a mass meeting attended by 150 members of the fishing Coops of neighboring Ginoza, Kin, and Ishikawa (total members: 316) demanded immediate cancelation of the construction plan. ("Ginoza nado gyokyo, Henoko isetsu ni hantai," *Okinawa taimusu*, 17 March 2013). Local newspaper articles cast some light on the apparent "pro-base" sentiment of the earlier Henoko meeting, quoting opinions among the participants such as "we cannot fish because of US exercises," "If the country determines

something, how can we resist?" and "It resembles the situation in which [in the Battle of Okinawa] people were collectively driven to group suicide." In the past, according to the three-part analysis in *Ryukyu shimpo*, it was possible for fishermen to earn in excess of five million yen per year, but now – with "US amphibious vehicles tearing up the *mozuku* (seaweed) fields" – only about one-third of that. "Hinuku umi de ikiru – Henoko umetate doi no shinso," *Ryukyu shimpo*, 13, 14, and 15 March 2013.