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Making Connections

Building an East Asia-U.S. Women's Network against U.S. Militarism

Gwyn Kirk and Margo Okazawa-Rey

In May 1997 some forty women activists and researchers from mainland Japan, Korea, Okinawa, the Philippines, and the United States gathered in Okinawa to talk and strategize together about the effects of U.S. military bases in each of these countries, especially on women and children, and on the environment. This four-day meeting was a new step in the ongoing process of building international links among women around such issues. It owed much to prior connections and networks. In July 1988, for example, a women's conference in Okinawa also brought together women from the same countries, with a focus on "the sale of women's sexual labor outside U.S. military bases in the region" (Sturdevant and Stoltzfus, 1992, p. vii). In 1989, the National Disarmament Program of the American Friends Service Committee organized a speaking tour in the U.S., entitled "Voices of Hope and Anger: Women Speak Out for Sovereignty and Self-Determination," with speakers from many countries that house U.S. military bases. Some of the participants at the recent meeting were involved in the 1993 U.N. Tribunal on Human Rights in Vienna, or the N.G.O. Forum of the Fourth U.N. Conference on Women in Hairou, China, in 1995. Some had worked together locally or regionally, but this whole group had never come together before. The inspiration for this meeting came from our hearing women from Korea, Okinawa, and the Philippines talking to North American audiences about the terrible effects of U.S. military bases in their countries, and our wanting to create a forum where they could also talk to each other as well as to women from the U.S. Carolyn Francis, Suzuyo Takazato and other members of Okinawa Women Act Against Military Violence were also involved in the core planning group. This paper outlines the main issues and perspectives that participants brought to the meeting in Okinawa, and also discusses the importance and the challenge of building anti-militarist alliances of women across boundaries of culture, class, race, age, and nation.¹

¹ We draw on reports presented to the meeting, formal discussions, informal conversations, and written materials brought by participating organizations as "text" for this paper. A list of participants is included as signatories to the final statement below.

U.S. Bases Overseas: Protecting American Interests

Participants shared the view that, at root, the purpose of U.S. military bases in Asia is to maintain the political, economic, and cultural dominance of the United States in the world, and to support U.S. corporate investments in Asia. The host governments are also complicit in this process, though many local people see the presence of U.S. bases as an outrageous encroachment on their sovereignty and self-determination. The presence of U.S. companies, U.S. popular culture and T.V., fast food outlets like Wendy's and MacDonald's, have all eroded traditional local cultures. Young people in South Korea and Okinawa, for example, are wearing ex-U.S. military uniforms and paraphernalia; some young people are keen to go onto the bases to learn English and hang out with young U.S. military personnel.

These understandings emerged during our four days of discussion as we reviewed the justifications that our governments have given us for maintaining high levels of U.S. military spending and the complex network of U.S. bases, troops, ships, submarines, and aircraft around the world. During the Cold War, one justification for U.S. military policy and intervention was to stop the spread of communism, and specifically to "contain" the Soviet Union. In the Asia-Pacific region dozens of U.S. bases in Okinawa, mainland Japan, and the Philippines were used as forward bases during the Korean War and the Vietnam War. U.S. troops lived there, training and resting while they waited to be sent into combat. The bases were refueling and repair depots for warships and planes. Military personnel were also "refueled" by local women and girls, through officially-sanctioned Rest and Recreation in the many bars, clubs, and massage parlors just outside the bases.

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dramatic changes in the political economy of the former Soviet Union, the Pentagon has sought to re-legitimize the military in the eyes of U.S. tax-payers and politicians by mobilizing public opinion in support of the Persian Gulf War, and by emphasizing a new international "policing" role for the military. In the latest review, a 1997 Pentagon report reiterated the view that the world is still a dangerous place. Its continued objective is to be able to fight and win two regional wars at the same time. For planning purposes these are assumed to be in the Middle East and Korea. This scenario justifies the need for ongoing war games and maneuvers at U.S. bases around the world, on ships at sea, and across large tracts of land belonging to local people. It assumes that 100,000 U.S. troops will continue to be based

in East Asia, and that the military budget will remain steady at around \$250 billion per year.²

In the mid-1990s a steady trickle of news reports of "war-mongering" attitudes and "uncompromising" or "belligerent" postures on the part of North Korea, China, and even Taiwan have appeared in the U.S. media, serving to keep alive the notion that there are serious military threats to U.S. interests in Asia. Other reasons for the continued justification of overseas bases are rooted in U.S. colonial history, where military interventions led to the appropriation of land and property and the opening up of new markets for U.S. goods. Racist contempt for "uncivilized savages" reinforced attitudes of U.S. superiority. Currently, the U.S. is number one in the world in terms of military bases, military technology, the training of foreign forces, and military aid to foreign countries. Many people in the United States believe that America is simply Number One and entitled to intervene in other countries' affairs if this is in "American interests."

At the meeting in Okinawa participants noted key events in their countries' histories a context for explaining current political perspectives and organizing efforts with regard to U.S. bases.

The Philippines

U.S. bases in the Philippines date back to 1898, the end of the Spanish-American War. The U.S. took over the Philippines from Spain, the former colonial power, against concerted Filipino resistance which the U.S. military put down with brutal force. Over the years there have been as many as 24 bases, the largest being Subic Bay Navy Base and Clark Air Force Base in Central Luzon. The Philippines became independent in 1946 but in 1947 the Philippines-U.S. Military Agreement allowed the U.S. unhampered use of Philippines territory for military bases and facilities for the next 44 years. The United States government made sure that future leaders of the Philippines would support U.S. economic and military interests in the country by channeling covert funds to pro-U.S. presidential candidates in the 1950s and '60s to ensure their victory. Successive U.S. administrations supported the dictatorship of President Marcos, which included more than a decade of martial law, with summary arrests, torture of detainees, and "disappearances." A strong nationalist movement saw the U.S. bases as completely undermining Philippines sovereignty and self-determination. With the overthrow of Marcos in 1986, this position was taken up by a vigorous anti-bases campaign. The bases also broke the terms of the Philippines Constitution of 1987, which declared the country

² Associated Press, "Cohen announces intention to keep U.S. military near present strength," *Japan Times*, 14 May 1997, p.6.

nuclear free. In December 1991 the Philippines Senate refused to renew the base agreement with the United States, and the U.S. military withdrew. A serious problem of the post-base years is the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) that gives the U.S. military access to 22 Philippines ports and airports for refueling, supplies, repairs, and R and R--potentially far greater access than before, but under the guise of a commercial arrangement and without the expense of maintaining a permanent workforce and facilities.

South Korea

Formerly an independent kingdom, Korea was annexed by Japan in 1910 until "liberated" by the Allies--the United States and the Soviet Union--in 1945 at the end of World War II. U.S. troops were stationed in the southern half of the peninsula below the 38th parallel and Soviet troops were stationed in the north. The Soviets blocked a U.N.-plan for nation-wide elections and the country was formally divided: the communist North, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and the capitalist South, the Republic of Korea, separated by a 155-mile long Demilitarized Zone, a strip of open land two and one-half miles wide, and heavily fortified. This new border has divided families whose members happened to end up on different sides, and is a grim reminder nowadays that in Korea the Cold War is not yet over.

In 1950 North Korea attempted to take over the South. Together with South Korean and U.N. forces, the United States reversed this attack, but the possibility that it may happen again--which contemporary commentators view as extremely unlikely--has been a cornerstone of U.S. military policy in Korea to this day. The Korean War (1950-53) caused great destruction of property and left four million people dead, with many thousands missing, wounded, or homeless. Now, over forty years after the end of the Korean War and over fifty years since Korean independence, the U.S. military presence is still very strong, with around 37,000 troops (some estimates are higher) and 120-180 military bases and installations across a country one-fourth the size of California. The Commander of U.S. forces in Korea also formally commands the Republic of South Korea army.

The Korean War ended with an armistice agreement but no formal peace treaty between North and South, which are technically still at war, and South Korea is considered a hardship posting for U.S. military personnel, who usually stay for one-year tours of duty. Since a possible war in Korea is part of the current Pentagon scenario, the continued presence of U.S. bases in the southern part of the peninsula is an unquestioned part of U.S.-Republic of Korea relations. The Mutual Defense Treaty of 1953, updated by the Status of Forces Act, 1967, provides for U.S. bases in South Korea for an

indefinite period, rent free. As the Korean economy has expanded the U.S. government has pressed for "burden sharing," and Korean taxpayers now contribute a considerable sum to maintain U.S. bases in Korea. The post-war Korean economy was partly built with U.S. economic aid, amounting to nearly \$6 billion between 1945 and 1978. In turn, successive authoritarian governments have been staunch allies of the U.S. and harsh in repressing political opposition and labor organizing, thus providing a stable, anti-worker business environment for transnational corporations, many of which are based in the U.S. and operate through Korean sub-contractors.

Many people want to see the reunification of the country, and the reunification of Germany, despite economic inequalities and differences of political ideology, has given added impetus to hopes that this can happen. Both Korean governments appear to be opposed and intransigent, and the presence of U.S. military bases in South Korea is a serious barrier. In the spring of 1997 university students and human rights activists organized national fundraising efforts in support of famine-stricken North Korea, and many South Koreans are concerned for long-lost family members in the North.

Japan

The presence of U.S. bases in Japan also stems from World War II. There are currently 60,000 U.S. military personnel in Japan (47,000 on bases and 13,000 on warships homeported there). The islands of Okinawa, the southern-most prefecture, house more than half the U.S. military personnel and 75% of the bases located in Japan. Twenty percent of Okinawa is currently occupied by U.S. bases, which house some 30,000 troops and another 22,500 family members. Okinawa is roughly midway between Tokyo and Manila, referred to as the "keystone of the Pacific" by military planners because of its strategic location. It was formerly an independent kingdom with its own language and culture; it came under Japanese influence as early as 1609, and was annexed by Japan in 1865. To this day there is considerable tension between Okinawans and mainland Japanese as a result of this history and the ongoing racism and ethnocentrism of many Japanese who consider Okinawans inferior. Okinawa is the poorest prefecture in Japan with the highest unemployment rate. It was governed directly by the U.S. until 1972, 25 years after the rest of Japan.

During the bitter, three-month long Battle of Okinawa between Japan and the U.S. at the end of World War II, Okinawan people were displaced from their homes by the fierce fighting. A third of the population was killed and the entire southern part of the main island was reduced to rubble. Under the subsequent U.S. military administration, local people were not allowed to return to their homes until the military had claimed land for bases. The rebuilt towns were squeezed tightly into the space available. By contrast,

the bases have sprawling lawns, golf courses, swimming pools, and US-style housing with swing sets and picnic tables. There are 20 children to a class in the U.S. base schools; Okinawan children are 40-45 to a class. In other parts of Japan U.S. planes cannot land after 7pm. At Kadena Air Force Base on the main island of Okinawa they can land at any time, and cause severe noise, day and night.

Like Korea, the Japanese government contributes to the upkeep of U.S. bases in Japan, and pays roughly \$100,000 a year for every service member stationed there. In addition, the Japanese government uses what is known in English as the "compassionate" budget or "benevolence" budget--ridiculous words for it, Japanese participants pointed out--to support U.S. bases. This "compassionate" budget started in 1978, quite separate from the provisions of the Status of Forces Act. The U.S. government was in a pinch after the expense of the Vietnam War and asked for financial help to cover medical insurance for Japanese civilians working on the bases. Japan agreed, out of compassion for the U.S. government, hence the name of this budget. It is now 44 times as big as it was originally, because the U.S. has kept asking for more. The Japanese government pays for electricity and water on the U.S. bases and pays highway tolls for U.S. military personnel. Japanese tax money also supports shopping centers, schools, libraries, and churches on the bases (even though the Japanese constitution separates church and state).

Although the military pays rent for the land it occupies, some landowners have always opposed the enforced appropriation of their land. The continued presence of the bases is challenged by these anti-war landlords together with organized labor, religious groups, women's groups, and political groups, with increasing demands for self-determination over the past two years. The abduction and rape of a 12-year old Okinawan girl by three U.S. military personnel in September 1995 outraged many Okinawan citizens and revitalized the long-simmering opposition to the bases. There were major demonstrations in Okinawa, and also in Tokyo. In October 1996, 53% of Okinawans voting in a local referendum were for base reduction. Though the referendum is not legally binding, it is an indication of popular opinion.

The United States

Participants from the U.S. emphasized the negative effects of U.S. military policy on many people in the United States. Roughly 50% of federal income-tax dollars is currently spent on the military (including wages, pensions, veterans services, the upkeep of hundreds of bases worldwide, weapons systems, and part of the national debt attributable to military spending). The U.S. is first in the world in military spending. In the past 20-30 years the U.S. labor force has changed due to automation and the

movement of jobs overseas, leading to high unemployment rates especially for young African Americans and Latinos. High military spending is justified in terms of jobs and some parts of the country depend heavily on military bases and military contractors for jobs. Components for the B2 bomber, for example, are made in 383 congressional districts (out of 435), so many people are involved. Ironically, military spending, which is very capital intensive, creates fewer jobs than any other form of investment.

In response to technological innovation and somewhat reduced budgets compared to the Reagan-Bush years, some bases are being decommissioned in the U.S., but these are generally large industrial facilities now considered obsolete. Decisions concerning which bases to close have been keenly contested. Many elected representatives have tried to argue persuasively in Washington that the bases in their constituencies should not be on the closure list. But despite closures and some reductions in military personnel, military spending has not been reduced significantly.

As well as economic support, there is great ideological support for the military in the U.S. expressed in terms of patriotism and national pride, and a belief in the rhetoric that the military keeps the world safe for "freedom and democracy". Many people are very ignorant about what the U.S. military does abroad, and have little reliable information about it. This ignorance is symptomatic of living in an imperial power. People are also absorbed with daily life, which is becoming increasingly hard for many, and distracted by consumerism. The U.S. is also number 1 in the world in shopping.

There is a division among U.S. feminists about the military. Some call for equal access for women within the military, and currently 12% of military personnel are women (43% of *them* are women of color, especially African Americans and Latinas). Organizations like the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), Women's Action for New Directions (WAND), and Women Against Military Madness (WAMM) oppose high levels of military spending while socially useful programs, especially those that support women and children, are being cut. Examples include prenatal care, pre-school education, health care, and welfare. These groups emphasize the negative effects of the U.S. military on people in the United States, as well as those affected by U.S. bases overseas. Young people in the U.S., especially poor or working-class young people of color, are going into the military for work, educational opportunities, and to get out of crisis-torn inner cities, sometimes referred to as the poverty draft. Thus the military creams off capable young people who might otherwise provide valuable leadership in their communities.

Negative Effects of U.S. Military Bases, Budgets, Policies, and Practices

Participants at the Okinawa meeting worked in small groups on four related themes: women and children, the environment, legal agreements between the U.S. and host countries, and base conversion, with economic development that will benefit local people, especially women. We had much more information concerning women and children compared to the other issues, as this has been the focus of much women's organizing to date.

Women and Children

Participants shared the view that violence against women is an integral part of U.S. military attitudes, training, and culture. It is not random, but systemic, and cannot simply be attributed to "a few bad apples" as the military authorities often try to do. We noted the many reports of rape, assault, and sexual harassment within the U.S. military that have come to light over the past few years. We also noted that U.S. military families experience higher rates of domestic violence compared to non-military families. But the main emphasis of our discussion concerned crimes of violence committed by U.S. military personnel against civilians in Korea, Japan, and the Philippines, especially violence against women, and the institutionalization of military prostitution.

Crimes of Violence

Women from all countries represented, including the U.S., reported crimes of violence committed by U.S. military personnel against local women. Okinawan women emphasized violent attacks of women and girls by U.S. military personnel, especially the marines who are in Okinawa in large numbers. In May 1995, for example, a 24-year old Okinawan woman was beaten to death by a US soldier with a hammer, in the doorway of her house. On their return from the Beijing Conference in September 1995, Okinawan women immediately organized around the rape of the 12-year old girl that had happened while they were away. This revitalized opposition to the U.S. military presence in Okinawa and drew worldwide attention to violence against women on the part of U.S. military personnel. The National Coalition for the Eradication of Crimes by U.S. Troops in Korea, which comprises human rights activists, religious groups, feminists, and labor activists, was galvanized into action by a particularly brutal rape and murder of a bar woman, Yoon Kum E, in 1992. Korean participants commented that pimps and soldiers try to intimidate the women against speaking out; also women are afraid of public humiliation. Drawing public attention to such crimes is embarrassing to the U.S. military. They are usually denied and covered up.

Militarized Prostitution

The governments of the three host countries have all made explicit agreements with the U.S. military concerning R and R (or I and I, intoxication and intercourse, as it is

sometimes called), including arrangements for regular health check-ups for women who service the men, assuming that they are the cause of sexually transmitted diseases. At the height of U.S. activity in the Philippines as many as 60,000 women and children were estimated to have worked in bars, night clubs, and massage parlors servicing U.S. troops. Participants noted many similarities concerning militarized prostitution in Asia, especially during the Vietnam War. U.S. military personnel returning from battle were angry, fearful, and frustrated, and took it out on Okinawan and Filipino women. In Okinawa there are many stories of women being beaten, choked, and killed. Many survived, now in their 50s and 60s, but their scars remain. Currently it is Filipinas who work in the clubs around U.S. bases in Okinawa, because the strength of the Japanese economy has given Okinawan women other opportunities and reduced the buying power of soldiers' dollars.

Military prostitution serves the interests of patriarchal politics. It divides so-called "good" from "bad" women; moreover, separate bars for white servicemen and African Americans also divide bar women into two categories. This work is highly stigmatized and marrying a foreigner is thought to be the only way out by many bar women. Militarized prostitution has had very serious effects on women's health, including HIV/AIDs, sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions, drug and alcohol dependency, malnutrition, respiratory diseases, and psychological problems related to the trauma and violence of this work.

In the Philippines WEDPRO, BUKLOD, GABRIELA, and the Coalition against Trafficking in Women (Asia) are tackling this very difficult issue in several ways: providing support to women and Amerasian children through counseling, daycare, legal and medical services, and referrals to other agencies; training women in business skills, especially to set up micro enterprises, get access to loans, and by helping women's co-ops; through public education and advocacy, and political activism. The Philippines Constitution enshrines the ideals of a peaceful, just, and humane society; a self-reliant national economy; social justice in all phases of national development; respect for the rights of people and organizations at all levels of decision-making; and the protection of people's rights to a balanced and healthful ecology. It is now nearly seven years since the United States military withdrew from the Philippines but there have been no government programs to address the needs of women and children. Women who worked in the bars were faced with how to survive. Some went to South Korea or Guam to service U.S. troops, others moved to Filipino bars and clubs, and still others tried to make a go of small businesses. Many are still working in the bars around Olongapo City and Angeles, servicing troops on shore leave, as well as tourists, mainly from Australia and Europe. In

March 1996 some 2,500-3,000 military personnel took shore leave in the Philippines, creating such a high demand that the mayors of Angeles and Olongapo quickly got together to work out where to get more women.

In Korea, military prostitution has deep roots in Japanese imperialism, continued under the U.S. Prostituted women in G.I. Towns (*kijichon*) outside the bases work in deplorable conditions and earn roughly \$170 per month. They are allowed one rest day per month; if they take an additional rest day they are fined half a month's wages. Among the older women who draw in customers to bars and clubs are comfort women who survived the Japanese. Two Korean NGOs, Du Rae Bang, and Sae Woom Tuh, work with bar women and women who date U.S. military personnel. They focus on counseling, education, providing shelter and alternative employment. A bakery at Du Rae Bang has been running for 9 years and has led the way for some bar women to learn new skills and become self-reliant. Similarly, Sae Woom Tuh women have started a herb-growing project. Both these organizations seek to empower bar women to make demands of the Korean and U.S. governments concerning their situation, and to educate the wider society on this issue.

Korean participants also reported that in the past few years G.I. Towns have undergone changes, becoming international prostitution zones for foreign men, with foreign women workers coming to Korea from the Philippines, China, Taiwan, and Russia, some of them illegally. They noted links between militarized prostitution and sex tourism; many problems similar to those in the Philippines and much to learn from that experience. Korean participants emphasized the exploitation and violence of *kijichon* women and also included powerful stories of their strength. There are examples of women clubbing together to buy each other out of the bar, for example. In the case of Yoon Kum E, another bar woman who knew the murderer waited outside the base for him and forced military police to arrest him. He still had blood on his white pants.

Amerasian children

Amerasian children are a particularly stigmatized group in all three Asian countries represented. They suffer great discrimination due to their physical appearance and the stigma of their mothers' work. Those with African-American fathers face worse treatment than those with white fathers. Most Amerasians grow up poor with no regular income in their families. They are discriminated against in employment due to stigma, a lack of training and education, the absence of credit and other supports for poor families. The average age of Amerasians in the Philippines is 12 years. Two-thirds are raised by single mothers; others by relatives and non-relatives; 6% live on their own or in institutions. 90% are born to single mothers. A lawsuit filed in the U.S. in 1993 on

behalf of Amerasian children in the Philippines was not met in any serious way. Six basic needs identified by Amerasians in the Philippines are education, employment, housing, livelihood, skills, and U.S. citizenship so as to be able to find their fathers.

Similarly, in Korea Amerasians are thought of as "half persons" who can only half-belong to Korean or to U.S. society. Most older Amerasian people have menial jobs; some are stateless persons who have never been officially registered and, as a result, could not attend Korean schools. There is no government support for Amerasian children from either the Korean or U.S. governments. The 1982 Amerasian Immigration Act, passed mainly with Vietnamese Amerasian children in mind, is of little help to many Amerasians in Korea, Japan, or the Philippines due to its stringent conditions. It only applies to people born between 1951 and 1982; an applicant needs documentation that their father is a U.S. citizen, and also a financial sponsor in the U.S. In each country limited support to Amerasian children is provided by local NGOs and the U.S.-based Pearl Buck Foundation. In Korea, Du Rae Bang and Sae Woom Tuh have educational programs for Amerasian children, and seek to educate Korean society about their situation. The women of Sae Woom Tuh demanded that every Amerasian be given U.S. citizenship and educational opportunities, with visas for their mothers. The Korean government should also provide education, job training, basic livelihood, and medical care.

Environmental Hazards

Militaries cause more pollution than any other institutions. Participants from all countries represented talked about the environmental contamination of baselands, ground water, and the ocean as a result of military activities, and the possible effects of toxic pollution on communities near the bases. The land has been used for weapons storage (including chemical and nuclear weapons in some cases), and the repair of ships and planes and military equipment. Major air force bases store large quantities of fuel, oil, solvents, and other chemicals. Some areas, like Iejima island in Okinawa and small islands off the coast of Korea have been used as bombing ranges for many years. There are unexploded shells in places used for live ammunition drills. In Korea and Okinawa U.S. marines have fired depleted uranium shells. Participants from all the countries represented knew stories of particular incidents of accidents or sickness affecting people living near U.S. military bases. In the Philippines, water from wells near Clark Air Force Base has left a golden yellow stain on plastic water buckets, suggesting contamination. There seems to be a high incidence of breast cancer and cervical cancer in women living near the former bases, and hearing problems and other health conditions in children. In 1996 an interim report on babies born to women living near Kadena Air Force Base in

Okinawa showed that these babies have significantly lower birthweights than those in other parts of Okinawa, which local people attribute to the severe noise generated by the base.

In general little information about the environmental effects of military operations is available to local people, though there are active environmental groups in all our countries, some of whom are working on the need for the clean-up of contamination caused by U.S. military operations. If the experience of bases in the U.S. is any guide, military records of contaminants, if available, may not be complete. The Korean government, for example, denies reports of environmental contamination caused by U.S. military activities because it fears this will fuel anti-bases sentiment in the country. In any case, under the Status of Forces Act, the Korean government cannot release information about environmental contamination without agreement of the U.S. military. The Philippines government is also unwilling to pursue this matter for fear that it will deter prospective investors in baseland redevelopment. The Japanese government, similarly, does not release information about contamination of U.S. bases in Japan. There is a great deal of research to be done on this issue in all our countries. This may start with anecdotal information, noting patterns, gathered by local people who have worked on the bases or who live nearby, as well as more formal research. It is notoriously difficult to pinpoint environmental causes because of the difficulty of controlling for all variables. It is also a slow process. The U.S. government has finally accepted responsibility for some cancers in military personnel who were exposed to radiation during atomic tests in the Pacific in the 1950s, or in residents of St. George, Utah, who live "downwind" of the Nevada Test Site. In the U.S. contamination attributable to military programs also includes the contamination of land and water around military bases, nuclear power plants, nuclear weapons plants, uranium mines, and radioactive waste dumps. In base conversion in the San Francisco Bay Area, for example, it has been determined that human beings cannot live on the former bases for at least 20 years and that fish caught locally should not be eaten.

Current negotiations between the U.S. military and Japan over bases in Okinawa could also have a serious environmental impact. Okinawans are demanding the return of Futenma Marine Corps Air Station, which takes up acres of land in Ginowan City. In return the U.S. military are insisting that a new floating heliport should be built off the coast, with clear implication for the ocean environment. Other proposals for military use of areas in the north of Okinawa would destroy fertile agricultural land and likely affect the island's main water supply reservoirs.

Limited Legal Protection

Provisions governing the use of land for overseas bases, and details of required conduct for U.S. military personnel are found in the Japanese Status of Forces Act, the Korean Status of Forces Act, and the Philippines Access and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA). These provisions vary considerably from one host country to another. We noted that this was a probably a historic moment, where women looked at these agreements from a gender perspective for the first time. Comparing the different Status of Forces Acts, one of the working groups at the Okinawa meeting found that the German Status of Forces Act is some 300 pages long (in English translation) including detailed provisions for the protection of Amerasian children and environmental cleanup that hold the U.S. military accountable to standards set down in German environmental law. The Status of Forces Acts for Japan and Korea are some 50 pages long (English translations), with no provisions for environmental cleanup. This may be because Japan and Korea have not developed sufficiently detailed environmental law standards, because these governments did not push for such provisions, or because the U.S. ignored their concerns. Japanese participants commented that Japanese law is inadequate for the protection of either women or the environment. In Korea, the U.S. military can use land for bases forever, for no payment. Land belonging to private landowners was simply confiscated, so there are no Korean anti-war landowners as there are in Okinawa. Clearly, the various host governments are in relatively different power positions in relation to the United States, though none of them come to negotiations as equal partners. The Philippines ACSA is written on one page.

One area of concern for participants is what happens to U.S. servicemen who commit crimes against local people. The National Campaign for the Eradication of Crimes by U.S. Troops in Korea cites a Korean Congress report that estimates 39,542 crimes committed against Korean civilians by U.S. military personnel between 1967 and 1987. These include murders, brutal rapes and sexual abuse, arson, theft, smuggling, fraud, traffic offenses, and an outflow of P.X. merchandise and a black market in U.S. goods. The Japanese and Korean Status of Forces Acts protect such military personnel from Korean or Japanese law. In many cases, they are disciplined, if at all, by U.S. military authorities. Often they are simply moved to another posting, perhaps back to the United States. Thus, military personnel who have injured or, in some cases, killed local people through negligent driving, for example, are usually not brought to trial in local courts. This situation incenses local people who see it as a daily manifestation of U.S. insensitivity and high-handedness. In both Japan and Korea there are current pressures for changes in the Status of Forces Acts to give more protection to local people. The case of the 12-year old girl who was raped in Okinawa was unusual in that the U.S. authorities

handed over the three military personnel responsible (two Marines and a sailor) to Japanese civilian authorities in view of the enormous popular outcry this incident generated in Okinawa and internationally. The young men stood trial in a Japanese court, were found guilty, and are serving seven-year sentences in the Japanese prison system.

Base Conversion

The Philippines experience of base conversion provided important data for women from Korea and Japan, perhaps especially those from Okinawa where a strong anti-bases campaign is pushing the issue of the future use of land currently occupied by U.S. bases. Participants from the Philippines emphasized that the overall economic, social, and cultural impact of the bases has been to strengthen neo-colonial relations. In the Philippines, Korea, and Okinawa, U.S. goods from P.X. stores, military surplus, or U.S. military families are in high demand by local people. Korean participants reported that this is a serious problem in Korea. There is an outflow of P.X. goods from U.S. bases and a black market in U.S. goods. Under the Status of Forces Act, U.S. military personnel in Korea do not pay customs duty for imports and can sell U.S. goods to local people at a big margin. This reinforces the view that the best goods and services come from the U.S. Duty-free stores in the former baselands in the Philippines sell U.S. goods, continuing the "P.X. culture." Canned foods from Del Monte and Hormell, for example, are available there, undercutting local grocery stores and tying people into the export economy. More food could be grown locally, but in the interests of earning hard currency, much of the best land in the Philippines is not used for local food production but to grow cash crops or for industrial development.

Subic Bay Navy base and Clark Air Force Base were very large (Subic Bay took up some 70,000 acres) and their closure presented a major opportunity for new development, especially in a country like the Philippines where seventy percent of the people live below the poverty line. Several plans that would benefit local people were put forward, including recommendations by WEDPRO, but the government preferred to attract foreign investment from Japan, Taiwan, Korea, the U.S., and Europe, using local people as cheap labor. Both bases now have duty-free shops, new hotels, private casinos, and golf courses. Their very large airfields are international airports, bringing tourists and businessmen directly to these development areas. Some military buildings have been freshly painted and converted into hotels. Others provide housing for the Philippines air force, or industrial space for factories making electronic products and hospital supplies. Federal Express now uses Subic Bay as its Asia hub. This kind of development was justified on the argument that it would create jobs. So far most jobs are part-time or temporary, and low paid, sometimes below the minimum wage of 143 pesos a day. As

mayor of Olongapo City, Richard Gordon initiated a project called "People Power" (appropriating the slogan of 1980s pro-democracy movement) where people volunteer to work on the base for a year, clearing trash, planting and weeding flowerbeds. There is no guarantee that they will get paid employment after doing this free work, though this is implied. As mentioned above, there has been no government help for the many women who used to work in bars and clubs near the base, or for their Amerasian children.

Women from Okinawa talked of their concerns about future redevelopment of the bases, especially with the Philippines experience in mind. Given the political situation in Korea, this discussion is not yet on the horizon there. In the United States the process of base conversion has generally involved more consultation with citizen groups than has happened in the Philippines, and the authorities have taken responsibility for toxic cleanup though it is debatable whether sufficient funds have been devoted to this. But base conversion in the U.S. is another form of privatization, as formerly public land passes to private investors.

Participants suggested compiling a women's budget, comparing current military spending with socially useful expenditure, and a women's Status of Forces Agreement.

Building International Alliances among Women

During the meeting, both in formal sessions and informal conversations, we talked about the importance of acknowledging the complex inequalities among participants, and the relationships of domination and oppression that exist among our countries. This includes the dominant position of the United States, economically, politically, and culturally in many Asian countries, and specifically the colonization of the Philippines. At the same time, there are many people in the United States who are also hurt by U.S. military policies, and much current military recruitment can be seen in terms of a "poverty draft." Then there is the imperial history of Japan, which sought to control eastern Asia from the central Pacific to India. Japan colonized Okinawa in 1865, Korean in 1910, and the Philippines from 1942 to 1945. Koreans were profoundly affected by 35 years of Japanese colonization. Korean names, language, newspapers, and political parties were all banned by the Japanese. There was discrimination in education and employment, and the extraction of raw materials and agricultural produce for use in Japan. Many thousands of Koreans were forcibly drafted to work in the Japanese war effort--men in factories and mines, women to sexually service the Japanese Imperial Army. Filipinas, too, were forced to be "comfort" women. Now Korea's staggering post-war economic growth means that Korean companies are in the Philippines alongside companies from Japan, Taiwan, and the United States, making money out of a much poorer country. For

Okinawans there is a clear distinction between Okinawa and mainland Japan, and long-standing resentment of Japan's colonization of Okinawa. Okinawa was used as a shield in World War II, protecting mainland Japan from direct U.S. invasion. Okinawan participants commented that some of the Okinawans who lost their lives in the Battle of Okinawa were killed by Japanese. Korean participants visiting Japan for the first time were surprised to learn of the similarities between the annexation of Korea and Okinawa. They had initially lumped Okinawans together with other Japanese because they had not known this history.

Such differences are reflected in participants' knowledge and perspectives. They are also reflected in something as mundane as needing a visa to attend the meeting. Those of us with European or U.S. passports did not need a visa to enter Japan. The Korean women had to fill in lengthy forms and attend an interview at the Japanese embassy in Seoul. Those with Philippine passports had to queue for hours at the Japanese embassy in Manila, which is open from 2-4pm, four days a week. They had to show a return ticket and an invitation letter from a Japanese organization. They had to explain their circumstances and answer any questions put to them by embassy staff. If successful, they had to return three working days later to collect the visa in person. Another difference is the buying power of our various currencies. Dollars go a long way in the Philippines; in Japan many everyday things are very expensive to those of us from the U.S. For Filipinas, who had to change pesos into hard currency, Japanese prices are astronomical. A third difference concerns the risks we take in speaking out on these issues. For example, it is officially illegal for Koreans to publicly oppose U.S. military policy in South Korea. They risk being labeled communist or unpatriotic, a serious charge in that context where many social activists have served jail sentences for opposing the government. Other participants are not constrained in the same way.

These histories and inequalities may make it difficult for women to sit down together, to really hear what each is saying, or to trust that women with relative privilege will be their allies. We tried to acknowledge these differences and inequalities and to frame issues and questions so as to be able to make connections. An example is the connection between U.S. domestic and foreign policy. These are often treated separately, but the military budget is a helpful way to link them. Not only does military spending harm women overseas, it also harms poor women and children in the U.S. In addition we needed to know something of each other's personal and national history, the economic and political conditions that obtain in our respective countries, and the constraints we experience as activists. Throughout the meeting the group emphasized the importance of listening carefully to our various perspectives and opinions. This is no small task under

any circumstances. Here it required careful translation into four languages (English, Japanese, Korean, and Tagalog), and translators who not only knew the technicalities of language but also something of the conceptual vocabulary and context assumed by different speakers. Many of the participants speak Japanese and a number speak English, with the result that these (imperial) languages were often dominant. This process is slow and sometimes cumbersome, requiring patience and concentration as well as skilled translators. In future meetings we need to pay more attention to translation and representation. In addition there is a need for more written materials on our respective concerns and organizing efforts, translated so as to be accessible.

The purposes of this network are to learn from each other; to deepen our understandings of our own situations and how these common issues play out in other places; to strategize together; and to work out practical ways we can help each other. The meeting generated a range of strategies including education and information sharing, research, media campaigns in each country, support for community-based organizations and coalition-building, lobbying and networking at local, national, regional, and international levels, and direct action. The local and regional organizations represented will work on these issues according to their own needs and circumstances. The following suggestions and plans for future projects emerged from our discussions:

- we should all distribute the final statement (see below) as widely as possible to government officials, NGOs, and members of the public;
- the four working groups should continue to work together and share information through the mail, e-mail, web sites, and personal visits;
- a new young people's group in Okinawa called DOVE (Deactivating Our Violent Establishments) will hold a day conference in June for young people to discuss these issues;
- women from the Philippines would like to go to Korea to find out more about Filipinas working in G.I. Towns;
- women in the U.S. undertook to try to initiate research into what happens to Korean women and Filipinas who marry U.S soldiers, where they live and what their lives are like. So far there is only anecdotal evidence that many end up in bars, clubs, and massage parlors in the U.S.;
- we should continue to analysis and comparison the different SOFAs and other legal agreements between host governments and the U.S.;
- we should compile information concerning environmental hazards, find out what evidence to look for and how to go about this;

- we should meet again, hopefully in 1998 in Washington DC, to liaise with relevant U.S. organizations, and to lobby members of Congress and their aides.

Security and Sustainability

Throughout the meeting the question of what constitutes true security kept coming up. In Japan, for example, the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty officially defines security. But this treaty in no way protected the 12-year old Okinawan girl who was raped, or others who have been harmed and abused by U.S. military personnel. Women's lack of security is directly linked to this Security Treaty. Participants agreed that the U.S. military presence does not protect local people but endangers them, and that we need to redefine security for our communities. We do not need 100,000 U.S. troops in Asia. Implicit throughout our discussion is the realization that true security requires respect for land, air, water, and the oceans, and a very different economy with an emphasis on ecological and economic sustainability not the pursuit of profit. The increasing globalization of the economy will create a world market where many countries cannot control their own resources or provide for their people. We recognized that environmental concerns and economic development are often currently in conflict. Thinking in terms of sustainability removes such conflicts.

Our vision is for a sustainable, life-affirming future focusing on small-scale projects, local autonomy and self-determination, with an emphasis on community land-use systems rather than private property. It includes the creation of true local democracies, the empowerment of local people, and the inclusion of women and children in decision-making. It will involve base conversion as well as non-military approaches to resolving conflicts. It means promoting the value of socially responsible work, and the elimination of weapons-making industries. We agreed that we need a deeper understanding of de-militarization that goes beyond bases, land, and weapons, to include cultures, consciousness, and national identities. Given that masculinity in many countries, including the United States, is defined in military terms, it will also involve a redefinition of masculinity, strength, power, and adventure. It will involve more harmonious ways of living among people, and between people and the non-human world that sustains us. It will need appropriate learning and education, cultural activities and values moving away from consumerism to sustainable living, where people can discover what it means to be more truly human.

Final Statement

WOMEN AND CHILDREN, MILITARISM, AND HUMAN RIGHTS:
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S WORKING CONFERENCE
NAHA CITY, OKINAWA
MAY 1-4, 1997

We are a group of women activists, policy-makers, and scholars from Okinawa, mainland Japan, Korea, the Philippines, and the United States who share a deep concern for the impact of the U.S. military presence on women and children in all our countries.

For four days we have exchanged information and strategized together about the situation of victims of violence committed by U.S. military personnel against civilians, especially women and children. We have shared information about the plight of Amerasian children who are abandoned by their military fathers, and the effects of U.S. military bases on the social environment, in particular on women who are absorbed into the dehumanizing and exploitive system of prostitution around U.S. bases. We have considered the current status of the various official agreements governing U.S. bases and military personnel; also the effects of high rates of military spending on women and children in the U.S. We see militarism as a system of structural violence, which turns its members into war machines and creates victims among women and children in our local communities. Underlying our discussions this week is the clear conviction that the U.S. military presence is a threat to our security, not a protection. We recognize that the governments of Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines are also complicit in this.

This is the first time that women have sat down together to discuss these issues, which are usually marginalized in discussions concerning U.S. military operations. As a result of our work this week, we see the many striking similarities in our various situations more clearly than ever before. As women activists, policy-makers, advocates, and scholars, we have strengthened our commitment to work together towards a world with true security based on justice, respect for each other across national boundaries, and economic planning based on local people's needs, especially the needs of women and children. We will continue to support women and children affected by U.S. militarism in all our countries, and to create alternative economic systems based on local people's needs. We will establish new guidelines to prevent military violence against women that are quite separate from existing official agreements.

In addition we demand the following:
-- that the Status of Forces Agreements between the United States and the governments of Japan and South Korea be significantly revised to protect the human

rights of women and children, and to include firm environmental guidelines for the cleanup of toxic contamination to restore our land and water and to protect the health of our communities;

- that the U.S. government cease circumventing constitutional provisions and national laws in imposing their continued military access or presence;
- that our governments pursue sincere efforts to support the democratization and reunification of Korea;
- that our governments take full responsibility for violence against women perpetrated by U.S. military personnel;
- that all military “R and R,” which has meant widespread sexual abuse and exploitation of local women and children, be banned;
- that all military personnel receive training aimed at preventing the sexual exploitation, harassment, and abuse of women and children who live and work around bases;
- that our governments provide substantial funding for the health care, education, training, and self-reliance of women who service U.S. troops, and their children, including Amerasian children;
- that the U.S. government and the governments of Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines take full financial responsibility for Amerasian children, and that the U.S. government introduce immigration law that provides for all Amerasians in these three countries;
- that all U.S. bases, weapons, and military personnel be removed from Japan and South Korea;
- that our governments fund detailed, independent research on health conditions due to military activities and operations (e.g. the incidence of low birth-weight babies in the vicinity of Kadena Air Base in Okinawa), as is being done in the U.S.;
- that our governments take full financial responsibility for environmental cleanup of U.S. military bases in a way that meets local people’s needs;
- that our governments and public agencies recognize the central importance of women’s issues in all base conversion projects, and include women in all levels of base-conversion decision-making;
- that money currently spent on the U.S. military by tax-payers in the U.S., Japan, and Korea be devoted to socially-useful programs that benefit women and children;
- that the lands currently in U.S. military use be developed to benefit local people rather than investors and transnational corporations as has happened at the former Subic Bay Naval Base and Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines;

-- that local, national, and international media investigate and report the issues and concerns referred to here, and educate people on the effects of the U.S. military presence in our countries.

We have committed ourselves to establishing an international network to hold our governments accountable on these issues, and to build a broad base of support to create a secure and sustainable world for future generations.

Signed by:

Okinawa

Takazato Suzuyo

Itokazu Keiko

Toguchi Sumiko

Matayoshi Kyoko

Miyagi Ryoko

Miyagi Harumi

Aguni Chieko

Karimata Nobuko

Kakazu Katsuko

Sueyoshi Shizuka

Sunagawa Kaori

Utsumi Emiko

Tengan Mayumi

Kuwae Teruko

Fukumura Yoko

Shinjo Shinobu

Kawakami Mutsuko

Amy Snow Landa

Rachel Cornwell

Carolyn Francis

Japan

Kobayashi Kayako

Matsumoto Yuiko

Matsui Yoshiko

Hanochi Seiko

Tomita Nobuyo

Tsuji Setsuko

Philippines

Alma Bulawan
 Cecilia Hofmann
 Aida Santos

South Korea

Ahn Il Soon
 Jeong Yu Jin
 Shin Hei Soo
 Chae Mi Hwa
 Cha Eun Young
 Lee Kyoung Mi
 Kim Hyun Sun
 Kim Myung Byun
 Kim Yeon Ja

United States

Jean Grossholtz
 Kathryn Johnson
 Gwyn Kirk
 Dorchen Leidholdt
 Martha Matsuoka
 Margo Okazawa-Rey
 Moë Uema-Yonamine

And other conference participants.

Resources

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