

April 20, 2017

Director - General, Ms. Irina Bokova
UNESCO
7 place Fontenoy
75007 Paris, France

Dear Ms. Irina Bokova

I am greatly honored to write to you. I am Takeshi Onaga, Governor of Okinawa Prefecture, Japan.

In Okinawa prefecture where we reside, the government of Japan is constructing a new U.S. military base by reclaiming waters at land in Henoko's Oura Bay which is home to precious biodiversity. Many Okinawans are opposed to the construction of a new base. On behalf of the people of Okinawa, I am writing this letter to you to seek for your understanding and cooperation in persuading both the Japanese and the U.S. governments to abandon the construction.

Located in the southernmost part of Japan, Okinawa prefecture consists of 160 islands and holds approximately 1.44 million people. The Okinawan main island, which is the biggest among the islands of Okinawa, has an area of about 1,208 square kilometers. Though our islands are rather small, the islands possess a natural environment with rich biodiversity thanks to its geology and has a unique history and culture inherited from our ancestors which make it stand out from the Japanese mainland.

Even 71 years after World War II, Okinawa, which accounts for only 0.6 percent of the total land area of Japan, is forced to host as much as approximately 71 percent of the facilities and areas used exclusively by the U.S. forces in Japan. The people of our prefecture have continuously suffered due to military aircraft noise, groundwater contamination by toxic substances, crashes of military aircraft, and crimes by military personnel and their civilian components. On top of that, the plan to construct a new base at Henoko will not only impose additional excessive base-hosting

burden and perpetuate our disproportionate share of the base-hosting burden within Japan but it also causes major issues regarding legal and environmental conservation matters. Therefore, we have been asking both the Japanese and the U.S. governments to abandon the plan.

On February 1, 2017, the government of Japan recommended four areas in the Ryukyu archipelago, which are scattered in the southern edge of the Japanese archipelago namely, Amami Island, Tokunoshima Island, northern Okinawan mainland and Iriomote Island as world natural heritage sites to the UNESCO World Heritage Center. The universal values of these remarkable areas are described as follows; 1) unique biological evolutions reflecting the geological history of small islands when separated from continents and 2) being crucial areas to conserve biodiversity represented by internationally rare indigenous species. We are truly proud that the northern area of the main island and Iriomote Island are recommended as the world heritage sites, as many rare indigenous species including Okinawa rails and Iriomote wildcats inhabit the area. We are actively working on towards registration in the World Heritage list.

On the other hand, it is a serious problem that the coastal zone of Henoko's Oura Bay, located next to northern parts of the Okinawan main island which are the recommended areas for the World Heritage site, are appointed as a reclamation site for the military base. The coastal area of Henoko's Oura Bay is designated as the highest Rank I area, which is subject to strict conservation status, in the Okinawa Prefectural Government's Guidelines on the Conservation of the Natural Environment. In addition, the area has been selected as important marine area to conserve biodiversity by a working group of experts established by the Japanese Ministry of Environment.

Concerning land reclamation projects, Japanese laws demand the implementation of appropriate measures to protect the environment which is impacted by the reclamation. From the time of the release of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), the Okinawa Prefectural Government has been asserting that it is impossible to preserve the environment of the area of the construction. The central government of

Japan has been carrying out the construction work based on a reclamation permit issued by the former governor of Okinawa in December 2013. However, it is clear that the actions of the central government will have an adverse effect on the precious environment of Henoko's Oura Bay due to several reasons.

First of all, according to the EIA conducted by the government of Japan, assessed that dugongs, an endangered marine mammal and a designated Japanese Natural Monument, were scarcely observed in Henoko's Oura Bay, however, a 2014 survey conducted after that EIA found a large number of dugong feeding trails within the planned base site. Despite these findings, the government of Japan continues construction. Although the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) made a recommendation for the conservation of dugongs to the government of Japan three (3) times in the past, the government has not fully dealt with the issue.

Secondly, more than 5,800 living species, including 262 endangered species, were identified on the sea floor of Henoko's Oura Bay by the Environmental Impact Assessment. The number of species exceeds that of other world natural heritage areas in Japan, even when taking the difference between sea and land into consideration. In addition, 1,300 species out of the 5,800 which were found by this assessment have yet to be classified. A full scientific survey has not been conducted on these unidentified species and no conservation measures have been implemented. In recent years, new species identified only in these waters have been discovered, and a new species belonging to the *daruma-zoanthid* genus was found for the first time in over 100 years. Another survey has long been recommended by biology-related academic groups and nature conservation groups.

Thirdly, concern has been raised over the possible introduction and spread of invasive species to Okinawa through the transportation of large quantities of rock and soil in the amount of 21 million cubic meters, equivalent to two million ten ton truck loads, mostly from mainland Japan for land reclamation. However, the government of Japan has not fully been able to address this matter. Despite recommendations on measures to counter the introduction and spread of non-native species through the

transportation of rock and soil at the IUCN general meeting held in September 2016, the government of Japan abstained from voting over these recommendations.

These issues are part of the problems related to conservation of our natural environment but there are many others. The attitude of the government of Japan is against the international trend which emphasizes conservation of biodiversity.

In a series of national elections, as well as the 2014 Okinawan gubernatorial election in which I was elected, the Okinawan people have been conveying their will to oppose the construction of the new base at Henoko. To make sure that their voices are heard, I will fully utilize all administrative powers at my disposal as the governor and take necessary legal measures in order to conserve the natural environment of Henoko's Oura Bay. I will remain steadfast in my stance of opposition to the construction of a new base.

However, the government of Japan is going ahead with land reclamation work without any inhibition, even going so far as to sue the prefectural government and me personally for damages. This miraculous ocean, with its rich biodiversity, is on the verge of disappearing forever from our planet.

On behalf of the people of Okinawa, I implore you to understand the significance of conserving biodiversity in Henoko's Oura Bay, and to urge the Japanese and the U.S. governments to abandon construction of this new base at Henoko. Please help tell the world about our situation/plight.

Sincerely,

Takeshi Onaga
Governor of Okinawa Prefecture