

JEJU INTERNATIONAL INTERFAITH SOLIDARITY VISIT

December 5–8, 2011

Preamble

The plan for this visit began at the meeting of the 3rd Asia Inter-Religious Conference on Article 9 held in Okinawa, October 5-7, 2011, which focused on militarization in Asia, including the United States' extensive access to military bases in Okinawa, Jeju, and across the Philippines. At that meeting, the NCCK volunteered to host an international interfaith solidarity and fact-finding visit to Jeju Island. Thirteen international participants of Buddhist, Catholic, and Protestant faith traditions attended this visit: six from Japan, five from North America, one from Taiwan and one representative of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), along with eight Korean representatives. Before the visit, the issue took on new urgency as the United States verbally committed to renewing its military presence in Asia and announced that it will establish a military base in Darwin, Australia.

Statement

We, an interfaith delegation for peace from the Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, the United States and Canada, **urge the Republic of Korea to stop constructing the Kangjeong Naval base on Jeju Island.**

We have observed the long and painful struggles of the Kangjeong villagers, Jeju citizens, and peace-loving Koreans who oppose the military base. During our visit to Jeju on December 5-7, 2011, we listened to the people who are actively struggling in opposition to the naval base, and today we stand in solidarity with them.

As people of faith, we know that military force cannot bring or preserve true, sustainable security for any of the world's populations, especially those who are most vulnerable. The Korean peninsula is an important geo-political location and could serve as a nexus of the peace that begets true security. But with the impending and ongoing construction of a military base on Jeju Island, it would instead become exploited to serve military expansion in the region, while inhibiting the local, peaceful culture that has thrived for centuries. This exploitation will negatively impact the people, culture and environment of Jeju.

We witnessed firsthand the unusually heavy police presence in Kanjeong village and felt for ourselves some of the intimidation and powerlessness the residents experience every day. We are also conscious of the outsized fines levied on some villagers who resist base construction, and of the legal costs the village has assumed in filing suit under Korean law to prevent base construction. Beyond these immediate concerns, we believe that those villagers who make their living from tourism, fishing and diving are at risk of losing their livelihoods should construction continue. We also know that military bases are destructive of village culture and values and potentially bring increased crime and violence into communities in as close proximity to a base as KangJeong village is to the planned base site. It seems to us inevitable that many residents will be displaced from their homes, jobs and social networks should the base open. As people of faith, we must stand in solidarity with the villagers and their allies in the larger Korean community.

Turning to the environmental costs of the base, we note that UNESCO has designated Jeju Island an ecological reserve and world heritage site. It is also considered a World Geological Park because of its pristine natural environment and beautiful sceneries. Kangjeong village is an ecological reserve of soft coral beds and rare basalt rocks, which must be protected from the destruction that the naval base would inevitably cause. The biological heritage and natural beauty of the Kangjeong environment are a gift to all peoples, not the exclusive property of the Korean Navy. Our responsibility to respect and care for the integrity of creation demands that we oppose the construction of this base.

The US has announced it will establish a military base in Darwin, Australia, which is likely to exacerbate military tensions between the United States and China. We believe that construction of a naval base on Jeju Island would do the same, since the United States government under existing treaty agreements with the Republic of Korea would have unlimited access to the new base. The expansion of U.S. and other nations'

military presence in this region concerns us. The parallels between the situations of the people of Kangjeong and the people of Henoko, Okinawa, strike us as significant and ominous: lack of democratic decision making processes, lack of concern for the plight of the local residents, and lack of concern for the environment, unique in different ways but present at both sites.

In addition, this base is being built specifically to accommodate Aegis-equipped missile destroyers. This would be a discernable escalation of military capacity from what currently exists in the region. As people of faith, we are called and committed to quelling any increased arms race, which puts existing human and biological communities at imminent risk of destruction. In many parts of the world, military spending remains high while the young, the poor and the infirm suffer loss of social services to meet budget constraints. We affirm that people, their health and their livelihoods take priority over weapons and other tools of war.

THEREFORE, we urge the Korean government to immediately stop all construction of the naval base and take steps toward reconciliation with the Kangjeong villagers, specifically:

- 1) The Republic of Korea should immediately stop construction of the Kangjeong naval base.
- 2) The Republic of Korea should immediately stop arresting peaceful protestors and immediately drop any pending charges against the Kangjeong village protestors.
- 3) The Republic of Korea should immediately revoke fines and other impending penalties imposed on the villagers as a result of their peaceful protests against the naval base's construction.
- 4) The Republic of Korea and all other concerned parties should respect the Kangjeong village's democratic processes, thus allowing all parties to bring reconciliation to the conflicts that have arisen around the base controversy, and to re-establish respect for just, democratic rule of law in Jeju Island.
- 5) The Republic of Korea and all other concerned parties should invest in preserving the Kangjeong village's shoreline ecosystem and designate a peace park where the naval base was to be constructed, as the villagers have requested.