

Where is Yanbaru?

The wide forest area in the northern part of Okinawa Island is called Yanbaru. Its subtropical natural forest and mountain stream provides habitats for over 4,000 species of wild life, including at least 11 animals and 12 plants peculiar to this Yanbaru area. Many of them are listed in the endangered species Red List, such as, Yanbaru Kuina (Okinawan Rail) or Noguchi Gera (Okinawan Woodpecker).

Yanbaru is not only considered to be domestically significant, but also globally crucial for its abundant nature. Numbers of people have acknowledged the nature's value, and eventually, the area is now one of the nominees of the World Natural Heritage and those of the National Park.



Takae in Higashi village and the U.S. military bases

Higashi is one of the villages in Yanbaru, and the small district located in the northern part of it is called Takae. Its population is approximately 160 people, 20% of which is junior high school students and younger including preschoolers. The kids are happily growing up in the surrounding beautiful mountains and rivers. However, adjacent to this natural area is U.S. marines' Northern Training Area (Jungle Warfare Training Center), which totals up to 7,800 hectares. U.S. started using this training area in 1957, few years before U.S. went down in to the quagmire of the Vietnam War, mainly for the purpose of the guerilla warfare training.

Currently, there are 22 helipads (landing zones) scattered in the training area, and Takae's local habitants have been forced to suffer from the ear-breaking sound of the propellers, and the high possibility that the helicopters might crash into the area. Even so, six more helipads are going to be constructed. The planned location is only 400 meters away from the nearest residence.



Why are the helipads planned to be located in Takae? What is the SACO agreement?

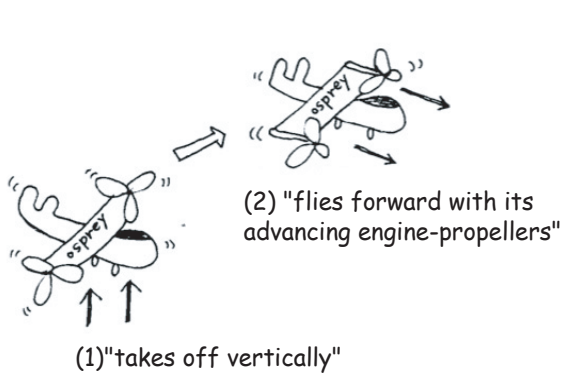
SACO is a term that always appears when discussing U.S. military bases in Okinawa. In 1995, right after the tragedy of three American soldiers raping a local girl, approximately one hundred thousand people in Okinawa had demonstrations against the military's presence. In response to this action, U.S. and Japanese governments established SACO (Special Action Committee on Okinawa), in which they aimed "to reduce the impact of the activities of U.S. forces on communities in Okinawa." However, the actual and hidden intention of this committee was "restructuring and re-strengthening of the bases."

About the returning plan of the half of Northern Training Area, both of the governments agreed to set it with the two conditions. One is to provide the estuary region of Uka river in order to ensure access from the Training Area to the ocean. And the other is the relocation of helipads to the remaining Training Area, which found to be the construction plan of 6 new helipads surrounding Takae residential district. They also hid the conspiracy to deploy the new type of aircraft, V-22 Osprey.



What is Osprey?

Currently, Helicopters like CH46 fly across the sky of Takae even after 10 p.m. These helicopters fly so low that streets in the residential area are often littered with the crashed-down trees. Despite this very dangerous situation, the new Ospreys, which are going to be deployed soon, are even more dangerous: their flying distance is five times longer, capacity three times more (one Osprey is 27.5 tons if loaded to maximum), and the speed twice faster, than CH46. If so, how many times will the noise be louder? Ospreys are not only capable of taking off vertically but also sliding and taking off parallel, which enables 3.5 tons more of loading than vertical takeoff. The six planned helipads, experts call "Osprey Pads" for they might specially be built for Osprey operations. Three of the 15 Ospreys produced in the year 2000 already had accidents, and ever after, voices of disagreement have been appearing even in the U.S. domestically.



Osprey



The U.S. military facilities in Okinawa



Yambaru water is being contaminated!

There are five dams in the Northern Training Area, which are crucial to the people living in Okinawa because the dams supply 60 % of life water to the island. In 2007, more than 10,000 wasted ammunitions were found in these dams. Also, the fact has been revealed recently that the U. S. forces spread defoliant (Agent Orange) to the area during the Vietnam War. If the helipads are constructed, jungle training will be even more active, so possible further contamination of the water in these dams, has been a serious concern.



Money and Bases = Carrots and Sticks

In April 2007, a new mayor of Higashi village, who had been against the construction of the helipads in its election manifesto, was suddenly made a complete turn-around right after elected. He made an apology to the people by saying "I am aware that I broke the promise". Behind his change of the decision was this: Japanese government enacted a bill for facilitating and realigning the U. S. forces, which provides subsidies to related municipalities in return for the acceptance of US bases. In this moment, Japanese government didn't even hide implementation of the so-called "carrots and sticks" policy.

Some say that Okinawa should accept the U. S. force's stationing because, in such condition, Okinawa can take advantages to increase its economical benefit. However, the reality is that the provided subsidies result in revenues of private companies that came from the mainland Japan, not of the locals. And as aftereffects of it, the local governments need to waste budget to administrate the unneeded roads and buildings. Some also say that there are certain numbers of employments thanks to the U. S. bases, but consider the fact that Okinawa's average individual income and the unemployment rate are both the worst among all the prefectures in Japan, despite 75 per cent of U. S. bases in Japan are located in Okinawa.

Now, we have to admit that people's recognition of U. S. bases is quite controlled by this myth: "we can't live without the bases" in this island. The policy of "carrots and sticks, i.e. money and bases" is so influential that the local people are still polarized into advocates and oppositions toward the presence of the bases.





Sit-in action got started

Residents in Takae resolved to take actions against the helipad constructions on February 23, 2006. After that, we headed to the related organizations to appeal them to revise the construction plan. However, the Ministry of Defense began the construction on July 2, 2007, ignoring our voices. Since that date, we have been showing protest by sitting in at the construction area, sparing much of our daily lives.



We need everyone's attention!

The sit-in protest is taking place in Takae (also in Henoko) even now. This area of great nature has become the first importance for the nation that craves for fighting in war. This is not a particular issue to Takae; the same situation can happen at anytime anywhere in Japan. The U.S. military and Japan's self-defense forces are steadily combining, by wasting our taxes to realign the forces (The two governments already agreed upon the budget of ¥3,000 billion for the realignment). Also, it is our responsibility to support and raise our children peacefully. We need your recognition to us all!

Come to Takae!

*Participate in the movement by sitting in with us!
You can see and feel what is really going on in Takae.

Contact with "No Helipad Takae Resident Society"
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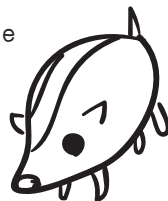
Noguchi Gera



Ryukyu Yamagame



Yanbaru Kuina



Ryukyu Inoshishi



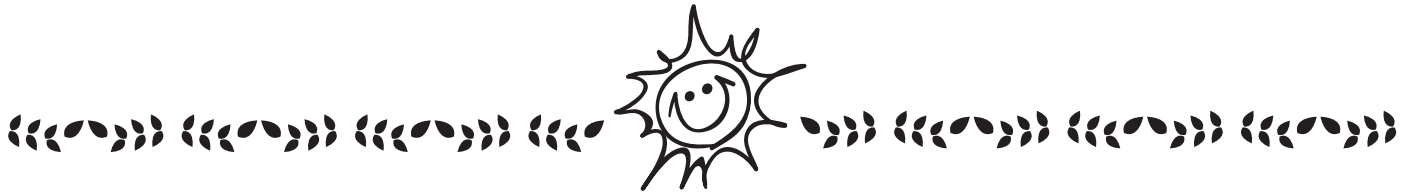
Hontou Akahige



Iboimori



Creatures in Yanbaru.



TAKAE Thereafter.

July 2, 2007–February 18, 2010



Suddenly, the Japanese government sued us

On November 2008, ODB (Okinawa Defense Bureau, a subordinate agency of Ministry of Defense) filed 15 residents and supporters a provisional injunction with the Naha District Court for obstructing the construction. Without setting up the negotiation with us, the Japanese government unfairly chose to use the judicial power to promote their plan. Against this governmental decision, a team of 24 lawyers was organized to protect our rights.

The litigation documents the government submitted to the court were very faulty. As we pointed out at the court, there were multifarious mistakes found in the documents such as scrambling of the names and faces of the accused. Moreover, an eight-year-old child was also included in the accused 15 (although there was no evidence). How is it possible for the child to block the construction by her or himself? After we strongly protested against that, ODB dropped charges of this child. But they did not admit their ethical fault at all.



The decision of the Naha district court

After five-time court hearing and the inspection of site by the judge, the judgment was given on December 11, 2009. Only two people out of 14 accused were charged with obstructing behavior, although other 12 people had been doing almost the same protest action.

The Japanese government also alleged that even our activities including appeals on the website, holding the events, creating posters and DVDs, and proposing to ODB that construction be stopped, were obstructive behaviors. According to the court decision, however, 'the court must be very cautious about treating those activities as obstructive behaviors.' That means our activities were recognized as justifiable. The Japanese government, however, treats our actions as obstructive behaviors and has still been trying to eliminate our protest.



To the court

On December 14, 2009, we filed official complaints against the Naha District Court because we were not satisfied with their decision. On the other hand, if the government decides to drop the suit, the provisional injunction order will be reversed. We hoped that ODB would cancel the order as the Democratic Party's victory in the election led to the change of government.

On January 29, 2010, however, the government filed a suit against 2 residents at the district court. The new administration continues to adhere to the administration policy of the previous Liberal Democratic Party regime. Hence the case will be referred to the open judicial court. The court decision for this case might set a crucial precedent for other protest movements in Japan such as anti-nuclear and anti-dam-construction movements which may face similar law suits.



Takae at the moment

On February 1, 2010, ODB held an explanatory meeting for the residents of Takae. But they repeated the same one-sided explanation without providing answers to our questions such as: whether V-22 Osprey, the US military's newest aircraft known for its safety risk, will be deployed, its flight route, degree of noise, and possible measures for the safety. This backhanded meeting made us more frustrated. Moreover, while ODB admits the lack of explanation they have given us, they also declared the construction would continue. This duplicity reflects ODB's irresponsibility as a public institution. On February 18, 2010, ODB finally started installing the fences in front of the paths that lead to the planned construction site.

What you can do for Takae



Get Information!

*Check out our blog to catch up with up-dated information of Takae
<http://takae.ti-da.net/> (written in Japanese).

*Get the DVDs

1 *The message from YANBARU*

documentary film of sit-in in Takae.

(contact: oracion@nohelipadtakae.org)

2 *KUKURU : UA Live in Yanbaru*

music concert in Takae by a singer called UA.

(contact: www.wacca.com/88)



Let other people know what is going on in Takae!

*Let your family and friends know the fact about Takae. Our grass-roots movements can influence the members of the Diet and the mass media. To hold screening tour of our films is also effective.



Come to Takae!

*Participate in the movement by sitting in with us! You can see and feel what is really going on in Takae.