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COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL  
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**IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT  
ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS**

**Written statement submitted by Shimin Gaikou Centre (SGC; Citizens'  
Diplomatic Centre for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Japan), a  
non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the  
Economic and Social Council**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is distributed in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1988/4.

[3 July 2001]

## **NGO report on Okinawa**

### **Background**

1. The Ryukyu Kingdom was an independent nation until 1879, when it was forcibly annexed and renamed Okinawa by the Government of Japan in contravention of article 51 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties. Since the annexation, the people of Okinawa, as an indigenous people, were subjected to colonial policies and forced assimilation. They faced various forms of discrimination and violations of human rights, including their economic, social and cultural rights as set out in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The Amami people, whose territory was already annexed by Japan in the seventeenth century, are among the Okinawan people.

2. Discrimination against the Okinawan people is apparent in two main manifestations, the first being the abnormal and illegal concentration of United States military bases in Okinawa, leading to multiple violations of the Okinawan people's rights. During wartime and under the subsequent military occupation, large tracts of Okinawan lands were expropriated by the Government of the United States, in contravention of the well-known 1907 Hague Warfare Regulations. Although these lands were illegally used to construct United States military bases and facilities, the Government of Japan did not oppose the unjust expropriation of the land and the violation of the right of the Okinawan people to be in command of their own development. Even after the territorial reversion of Okinawa to Japan in 1972, the Government of Japan has served the special interest of United States military forces in accordance with the Status of United States Forces Agreement. Consequently, although Okinawa accounts for only 0.6 per cent of the total land area of Japan, fully 75 per cent of all the United States military facilities in Japan are concentrated in this tiny area. The abnormally high concentration of military facilities on Okinawa especially threatens the human rights of women and children, who continue to suffer discrimination.

3. The second manifestation of discrimination towards Okinawans is the continued assimilation policies of the Government of Japan, carried out since the annexation. Popular movements of the Okinawans to re-evaluate their own history, culture, and languages and to restore their rights have been suppressed in a variety of ways. One of the most symbolic of these is reflected in the first report that the Government of Japan submitted to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in 1999. In its report, the Government made no reference whatsoever to the ethnic discrimination in Okinawa.

4. Taken together, these forms of discrimination lead to violations of the rights of the Okinawans provided by the ICESCR, which are listed below.

### **Article 6**

#### *Restrictions on freedom of work and occupation*

5. The abnormal concentration of United States military bases on Okinawa seriously impedes locally initiated community development. For example, United States bases

occupy 80 per cent of the town area of Kadena and many residents there cannot help but seek jobs on the base for their livelihood. As a result, their freedom in relation to work and occupation is unjustly limited.

*Denial of the right to development due to unlimited expansion of military facilities*

6. In 1995, the Governments of Japan and the United States jointly established the Special Action Committee on Okinawa (SACO) and in 1996 the two Governments published the SACO Final Report that promised a decrease in military facilities and listed 11 military zones to be returned to the Okinawans. However, the construction of an enormous new military base is planned at Nago, on Okinawa Island, and there is a plan to use Shimoji and Hateruma airports on the Sakishima Islands as military facilities in the near future. This unlimited expansion of military facilities has destroyed the normal economy of the Okinawans and has denied their right to development.

**Article 10**

*Discrimination regarding the rights of women and children*

7. In some cases, when Okinawan mothers married to United States servicemen claim alimony and child support, their claims are not fully covered. When United States military personnel suddenly return to the United States and abandon their families in Okinawa, the right of the spouse to sue for financial assistance is not guaranteed. This is not the case under the Status Agreement signed between the Governments of Germany and the United States. This means that mothers and children suffer serious violations of their rights to livelihood. The Government of Japan has not properly addressed this problem.

*Violations of the rights of women and children*

8. The unbearable jet noise around the military airfields has caused hearing difficulties among the Okinawan people, especially schoolchildren, who live nearby. This incessant noise has also made pregnant women give birth to low-weight babies.

9. United States servicemen have been involved in numerous criminal and civil cases of rape, injury, assault and murder where the victims have been Okinawan women and girls. However, because United States servicemen are protected under the Status of United States Forces Agreement, most of the cases are not reported.

**Article 12**

*Discriminatory policies affecting health rights*

10. Whenever military aircraft land or take off, they fly over residential districts in Okinawa, causing jet noise pollution. This has been a major social and health problem for Okinawans. Before the SACO Final Report was published, no measures had been taken to reduce noise levels. The SACO agreement did lead to the construction of a “sound-proof wall” along the north side of the Kadena air base for the declared purpose of protecting the human rights of the

citizens. However, the fact that the level of noise arising from “touch-and-go” exercises by planes of aircraft carriers has reached even higher levels than ever recorded before indicates that there has been no effective insurance against the violation of civil health rights.

*Denial of the right to live within a healthy environment*

11. Problems of environmental pollution have emerged on tracts of land returned to Okinawans. One specific case is Onna Communications Facility, which was returned in 1996 after being under United States military control. Chemical substances that are very harmful to humans, such as PCBs, were discovered in the soil where the facility’s internal water purification plant was located. The Government of Japan has not demanded that the United States military forces take responsibility for protecting the natural environment within the area; nor has it insisted that the United States authorities conduct environmental pollution surveys or present environmental assessment reports when facilities are returned to Okinawan ownership. Nor has the Government arranged for such surveys to be carried out by an independent third-party institution.

12. Across Okinawa, there is a steady spread of environmental pollution. Examples include the destruction of forest resources by shooting and bombing practice using live ammunition, water pollution caused by the erosion of the red clay soils that cover the mountains in the north of Okinawa Island, and radioactive pollution from depleted uranium shells.

13. The United States military bases are adjacent to densely populated areas and thus they continue to impose a daily psychological stress on the lives of the civilians. This applies especially to those who live next to ammunition dumps, where there is always a risk of explosions, as well as airfields, where there have been numerous aircraft crashes. Proximity to landing practice grounds also causes tremendous stress because there are accidents involving heavy vehicles which are mistakenly dropped by parachute. Finally, in the crowded skies over Okinawa, there are constant near-misses between military and civil aircrafts.

**Article 13**

14. The custom of punishing students for using the Ryukyuan (Okinawan) languages by making them wear what was called a “dialect tag” continued well after the end of the Second World War, especially in primary schools. The pre-war assimilationist policy that sought to eradicate Ryukyuan languages had clearly survived. Even today, using Ryukyuan languages in the classroom is discouraged. Nowadays the Government of Japan claims that its objective is to attain a multicultural society, yet it does not recognize the right to use and learn any Ryukyuan language within the public educational system.

15. The right of the Okinawan people to draw up an official curriculum, within existing educational institutions, that would educate students in their own history and culture of the Ryukyus is not guaranteed.

16. There is no programme to train teachers to teach their own history and culture of the Ryukyus.

17. The right of Okinawans to make their own textbooks and educational materials to teach their own history, languages and culture of the Ryukyus is not guaranteed.

#### **Article 15**

18. There has been no apology or compensation whatsoever from the Government of Japan for issuing assimilationist military orders during the Second World War to treat people who spoke the Ryukyuan languages as spies. Nor has there been redress for the abuse and violence inflicted under such orders. The Government of Japan has not apologized to or compensated the victims and their families.

19. The Ryukyuan languages are not recognized as the languages of the Okinawan people, but are defined as “dialects” as part of the assimilationist policy. The Ryukyuan languages are not recognized for use as an official language in the law courts or other public institutions.

20. The Ministry of Education and Science has taken no responsible action against the racist ban on performances of the traditional Ryukyuan eisaa (a traditional Okinawan dance) by supporters of Okinawan teams at the national high-school baseball tournament held twice a year at Koshien stadium.

21. We would like to thank the Association of Indigenous Peoples in the Ryukyus (AIPR) and the Okinawa Citizens' Information Center (OCIC) for their cooperation in the preparation of the present statement.

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