



Peace and Justice Commission

CONSENT CALENDAR
February 23, 2021

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
 From: Peace and Justice Commission
 Submitted by: Igor Tregub, Chairperson, Peace and Justice Commission
 Subject: Opposition of New U.S. Base Construction in the Henoko-Oura Bay of Okinawa

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a Resolution opposing new U.S. base construction in the Hemoko-Oura Bay of Okinawa.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF RECOMMENDATION

Minimal to negligible.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

At its March 2, 2020 meeting, the Peace and Justice Commission took the following action:

Recommend to the City Council a resolution opposing new U.S. base construction in the Hemoko-Oura Bay of Okinawa.

M/S/C: Bohn/Meola
 Ayes: al-Bazian, Askary, Bohn, Gussman, Lippman, Maran, Meola, Morizawa, Pancoast, Perry, Pierce, Rodriguez, Taplin, Tregub
 Noes: None
 Abstain: None
 Absent: None

BACKGROUND

A new U.S. military base is being constructed in the Pacific Ocean, in Okinawa's Oura Bay¹ in the Henoko region of Okinawa. Oura Bay is one of the most biodiverse ecosystems on the planet with over 5,300 species and world-renowned coral reef systems. Fully 262 of the species in Oura Bay are endangered, including the dugong,² a medium-sized marine mammal, which has been closely monitored internationally by

¹ "We shall overcome (戦場ぬ止み Ikusaba Nu Tudumi)," Trailer, YouTube video, October 3, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FEc_D_meOBY&list=PL55Jwk9JymqyuApWq7gi08uWQKyZhK3cH&index=20&t=0s

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jgJ46Gzkzfk&t=1s>

environmental groups due to its diminishing numbers as well as its status as a designated of indigenous historical value.³

On August 21, 2017, the 9th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals affirmed the right of American and Japanese conservation groups and Okinawan citizens to sue to compel the U.S. military to fully consider the impacts of a new U.S. military base in Okinawa, Japan.⁴ The base would pave over some of the last remaining habitat for endangered Okinawa dugongs, ancient cultural icons for the Okinawan people. The lawsuit is part of a long-running controversy over the expansion of a U.S. Marine air base at Okinawa's Henoko Bay. The court remanded the case to the district court for further proceedings.⁵

On January 9, 2020, American conservation groups and residents of Okinawa filed the opening brief in an appeal of a court ruling allowing construction of a US Marine Corps air base in the Japanese island's coastal waters. The brief, filed in the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco, highlights the base's threat to the Okinawa dugong, a critically endangered marine mammal related to manatees. Building the base will involve filling in and paving over hundreds of acres of rich coral and seagrass habitat crucial to the last surviving Okinawa dugongs. The Turtle Island Restoration Network, The Center for Biological Diversity, and the Japanese co-plaintiffs are represented in the case by Earthjustice, which filed the appeal. The 9th Circuit ruled in 2017 that Okinawa residents deserved a full hearing on their concerns. "The Okinawa dugong, sea turtles, coral reefs, humans and the ocean environment need the U.S. justice system to guard our genuine national security by rejecting this ecologically horrendous project," said Todd Steiner, founder and executive director of Turtle Island Restoration Network, at the time.⁶

It is noteworthy that Okinawa has been forced to host almost 70% of U.S. military facilities in Japan⁷ despite consisting only 0.6% of national land mass. Still, the Japanese government, in partnership with the U.S. government, continues building this U.S. base in the ocean – dropping concrete blocks on top of precious coral and

³ Expansion of US Military base puts endangered Henoko Bay Dugong at risk on Okinawa, Japan," May, 1, 2019 (last update), <https://ejatlas.org/conflict/henoko-bay-dugong-or-us-base-for-okinawa>

⁴ Okinawa Dugong Lawsuit Judge asks why US govt did not consult with environmental experts and Okinawans about Landfill, Construction Impact on Okinawa Dugong Cultural Heritage," June 28, 2018, <https://tenthousandthingsfromkyoto.blogspot.com/2018/06/okinawa-dugong-lawsuit-judge-asks-why.html>

⁵ Court Affirms Right to Sue U.S. Military Over New Base's Threats to Endangered Okinawa Dugong. *Rare Japanese Dugongs One Step Closer to Finally Getting Their Day in Court*, https://www.biologicaldiversity.org/news/press_releases/2017/okinawa-dugong-08-21-2017.php

⁶ Court Affirms Right to Sue U.S. Military Over New Base's Threats to Endangered Okinawa Dugong. *Rare Japanese Dugongs One Step Closer to Finally Getting Their Day in Court*, https://www.biologicaldiversity.org/news/press_releases/2017/okinawa-dugong-08-21-2017.php and Dugong Defenders to Rally Today at S.F. Hearing on U.S. Airbase's Threat to Endangered Animals 2/3/2020," <https://biologicaldiversity.org/w/news/press-releases/dugong-defenders-to-rally-today-at-sf-hearing-on-us-airbases-threat-to-endangered-animals-2020-02-03/>

⁷<https://www.pref.okinawa.jp/site/chijiko/kichitai/documents/us%20military%20base%20issues%20in%20okinawa.pdf>

suffocating the marine habitat with dirt and concrete – causing irreversible harm to the ecosystem. It is already adversely impacting the region; contributing to species collapse and furthering environmental damage already sustained from rapid climate change.⁸

The Okinawan people have exhausted all legal and peaceful means of opposing this new base from being forced upon them – from elders staging nonviolent protests and sit-ins to Okinawan governors challenging the Japanese government through the legal system, only to be disregarded in Tokyo and Washington, D.C.⁹ Okinawan Diaspora members of Global Uchinanchu Alliance (GUA)¹⁰ have come together to reach out for support in this international crisis. Most recently, the City of Berkeley has expressed its solidarity with the Okinawan people by passing a resolution in support of the immediate halting of new U.S. military base construction at Henoko, Okinawa on September 9, 2015.

In addition to environmental concerns, there are significant financial uncertainties associated with this project. Construction of the replacement facility in Okinawa for U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma will take nearly twice as long and cost three times as much as the initial estimates. This makes it certain that shutting down Futenma will now be delayed into the 2030s at the earliest due to additional work to improve the soft ground on the seafloor in the site's offshore areas — which was found in a boring survey three years ago. The entire cost of the project will be estimated to balloon from the initial forecast of \$350 billion to \$930 billion.¹¹ The opportunity costs of this enormous outlay of taxpayer dollars are even more acute in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic than ever before.

The construction of this base has been repeatedly opposed by the Okinawan people.¹² Most recently on February 24, 2019, over 70% of Okinawans voted in opposition to the construction of this U.S. Marine Corps base.¹³

⁸ On A Firm Foundation of Mayonnaise: Human and Natural Threats to the Construction of a New U.S. Base at Henoko, Okinawa," 3/15/18, <https://apjif.org/2018/10/Lummis.html>

⁹ Message to Obama from a Veteran in Okinawa," YouTube video, February 29, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6p5kXBod1gg&list=PL55Jwk9JymqyuApWq7gi08uWQKyZhK3cH&index=4&t=11s>

¹⁰ <https://uchinanchu.com/>

¹¹ Cost of Destructive U.S. Airbase Project in Japan Nearly Triples: Revised Estimate Sparks New Questions About Project That Threatens Okinawa Dugongs,"

<https://www.commondreams.org/newswire/2020/01/06/cost-destructive-us-airbase-project-japan-nearly-triples>

¹² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FEc_D_meOBY&list=PL55Jwk9JymqyuApWq7gi08uWQKyZhK3cH&index=20&t=0s

¹³ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-okinawa/japan-to-push-ahead-with-u-s-base-relocation-despite-okinawa-referendum-result-idUSKCN1QE06Q>

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

While there may be no identifiable direct environmental impacts or opportunities associated with the subject of this report, this resolution is a statement against U.S. involvement in grave environmental destruction in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of Okinawa.

RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

While the Peace and Justice Commission recommends adopting the resolution for a number of reasons, environmental reasons are at the core of this recommendation. On January 21, 2020, the City Council, by a 4-0-5 vote, took no action on a previous version of this resolution.¹⁴ It was noted at the time by some members of the City Council who abstained that a stronger environmental nexus was needed for them to consider supporting this resolution. This resolution is responsive to these concerns by highlighting the destructive environmental impacts of this project.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS CONSIDERED

The Peace and Justice Commission considered the alternative of not taking further action on this topic, but chose to address the concerns of these members by recommending a resolution with a more direct environmental nexus.

CITY MANAGER

The City Manager takes no position on the content and recommendations of the Commission's Report.

CONTACT PERSON

Igor Tregub, Chairperson, Peace and Justice Commission
Melissa McDonough, Senior Management Analyst, City Manager's Office, 510-981-7402

Attachments:

1: Resolution

Exhibit A: Resolution Opposing New U.S. Base Construction in Henolo-Oura Bay of Okinawa

¹⁴ https://www.cityofberkeley.info/Clerk/City_Council/2020/01_Jan/Documents/01-21_Annotated_Agenda_pdf.aspx

RESOLUTION NO. ##,###-N.S.

RESOLUTION OPPOSING NEW U.S. BASE CONSTRUCTION IN HENOKO-OURA
BAY OF OKINAWA

WHEREAS, the Peace and Justice Commission advises the City Council on all matters relating to the City of Berkeley's role in issues of peace and social justice (Berkeley Municipal Code Chapter 3.68.070); and

WHEREAS, [a new U.S. military base is being constructed in the ocean of Oura Bay](#). This bay is in the Henoko region of Okinawa. It is one of the most bio-diverse ecosystems on the planet with over 5,300 species and world-renown coral reef systems. 262 of the species in Oura Bay are endangered, including the [dugong](#) which have been closely monitored internationally by environmental groups due to its diminishing numbers as well as its status as a designated a [cultural property](#) of indigenous historical value; and

WHEREAS, on August 21, 2017, the 9th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals affirmed the right of American and Japanese conservation groups and Okinawan citizens to sue to compel the U.S. military to fully consider the impacts of a new U.S. military base in Okinawa, Japan. The base would pave over some of the last remaining habitat for endangered Okinawa dugongs, ancient cultural icons for the Okinawan people. The lawsuit is part of a long-running controversy over the expansion of a U.S. Marine air base at Okinawa's Henoko Bay. The court remanded the case to the district court for further proceedings; and

WHEREAS, on January 9, 2020, American conservation groups and residents of Okinawa filed the opening brief in an appeal of a court ruling allowing construction of a US Marine Corps air base in the Japanese island's coastal waters; and

WHEREAS, construction of the replacement facility in Okinawa for U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma will take nearly twice as long and cost three times as much as the initial estimates. This makes it certain that shutting down Futenma will now be delayed into the 2030s at the earliest due to additional work to improve the soft ground on the seafloor in the site's offshore areas — which was found in a boring survey three years ago. The entire cost of the project will balloon from the initial forecast of \$350 billion to \$930 billion; and

WHEREAS, the construction of this [base has been opposed by the Okinawan people repeatedly](#). Most recently on February 24, 2019, over 70% of Okinawans voted in opposition to the construction of this particular U.S. Marine Corps base outside of Camp Schwab. Still, the Japanese government, in partnership with the U.S. government, continues building this U.S. base in the ocean – dropping concrete blocks on top of precious coral and suffocating the marine habitat with dirt and concrete – causing irreversible harm to the ecosystem. It is already adversely impacting the region;

contributing to species collapse and furthering environmental damage already sustained from rapid climate change; and

WHEREAS, already, [Okinawa has been forced to host almost 70% of U.S. military facilities in Japan](#) despite consisting only 0.6% of national landmass; and

WHEREAS, this treatment of Okinawa as a colonial military outpost has continued since the Japanese annexation of the once sovereign nation of the Ryūkyū Kingdom. Then during WWII, Okinawan land was destroyed in a war between U.S. and Japan, taking almost a third of the entire Okinawan population. From there, the U.S. construction of military bases began against the will of the Okinawan people and [continues today](#); and

WHEREAS, the Okinawan people have exhausted all legal and peaceful means of opposing this new base from being forced upon them – from elders staging nonviolent protests and sit-ins to Okinawan governors challenging the Japanese government through the legal system, only to be disregarded in Tokyo and Washington, D.C. Okinawan Diaspora members of Global Uchinanchu Alliance ([GUA](#)) have come together to reach out for support in this international crisis; and

WHEREAS, the City of Berkeley has expressed its solidarity with the Okinawan people by passing a resolution in support of the immediate halting of new U.S. military base construction at Henoko, Okinawa, passed through the Berkeley City Council on September 9, 2015.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Council of the City of Berkeley directs the City Clerk to send the following message to the U.S. House Armed Services Committee:
The City of Berkeley, California stands in solidarity with the people of Okinawa in demanding the immediate and complete halt of the U.S. Marine Corps base construction in Henoko, Okinawa.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Council of the City of Berkeley asks the City Clerk to send a copy of this resolution to Representative Barbara Lee and Senator Dianne Feinstein.