WHAT DOES GANGJEONG FRIENDS DO?

During a recent regular monthly meeting, the Seoul-Gangdong branch of Gangjeong Friends, which has about 20 members, decided to coordinate, carry out, and support Gangjeong-related projects, besides its own community building. Jo Se-Sang of the branch says: “We are concerned with easy public access and database building of the numerously produced but not systematized precious materials produced by the group.”

A U.S. Base in Vincenza, Ita- ly, a special war zone was held. Activists from anti-militarism groups around the world were invited for a two-hour video conference meeting to share a short history of such struggles and discuss how to better cooperate together in solidarity. Joining the five video conferences were representa- tives from Guam, Hawaii, Jeju, Okinawa, Sicily, the U.S., Diego Garcia, Vietnam, and the Philippines. Participants from Jeju included the international team, Mayor Kang, Chairman Gu and Chairman Jo. Gangjeong. Although late at night, it was exciting to meet with friends and dream of stronger future solidarity.

TWO YEARS OF CATHOLIC SOLIDARITY

In June, the people of South Korea began a nationwide protest upon the discovery that The Korean National Intelligence Services (NIS) illegally intervened in the controversial 2012 Presidential elections. The NIS organized its agents to spread internet comments aimed at smearing dissenters and supportive politicians opposing undemocratic state projects such as the Jeju naval base, the Four Rivers’ Project and nuclear power plants, in “pro-North Korea.” It should be remembered that it was during the regime of dictators Park Chung Hee (1956–1979), current president Park Geun-Hye’s father, that the NIS was conceived in order to carry out its surveil- lance, persecution and capture his political dissidents, who were brutally tortured and killed by the NIS.

The nationwide nonviolent candlelight vigils in response to this controversy have grown from a few hundred volunteers to tens of thousands of volunteers. The vigil has produced daily and consistent media silence, as well as various government/NIS attempts to distract attention such as releasing previously confidential documents aimed at smearing dissidents and supportive politicians opposing undemocratic state projects such as the Jeju naval base, the Four Rivers’ Project and nuclear power plants, in “pro-North Korea.” It should be remembered that it was during the regime of dictators Park Chung Hee (1956–1979), current president Park Geun-Hye’s father, that the NIS was conceived in order to carry out its surveillance, persecution and capture his political dissidents, who were brutally tortured and killed by the NIS.

The widespread nonviolence of these vigils has been an example of its peacefulness. On August 15, the women of South Korea staged a peaceful rally in downtown Seoul for the 66th anniversary of the end of the Korean War. The peacefulness of these vigils contrasts sharply with the recent NIS-funded military exercises that have been taking place near the Jeju naval base, just north of Jeju Island. The NIS has been using these exercises to promote the military occupation of Jeju, a democratic island, as a symbol of its power and control over the Korean people.

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Jeju Bishop Kung Wo-II praised the mass with strong words saying, “People in power pledge that they will work for peace but they actually bring death, destruction, and war. War cannot lead to peace.”

At the end of the mass, Catholic Solidarity released a statement titled “One cannot love while holding offensive arms.” The statement urges the stop of base construction and appeals for the remotion of Gangwon to its original state. It also affirms that Catholic Solidarity will continue in prayer and nonviolent action for the peace of Gangjeong and Korea.

After the mass there was a concert in the street and then a meal together. The next day the people gathered again for an hour long prayer for peace at 10 a.m. and the Daily Mass for Life and Peace at 11 a.m.

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“The Ghosts of Jeju”

By Emily King

I was invited to Asia-Pacific Students and Youth Gathering (ASYG) as a workshop speaker, the youngest one there. It was then to share about my experiences in Gangjeong Anti-Base, a village in South Korea where I was arrested in April 2012 from entering Korea. I was then but one of the many foreigners who got deported and/or denied entry by the South Korean government because of the Gangjeong issue. This kind of treatment was unequaled to me in the past, but not anymore.

Upon arriving in Gangjeong, it was truly my pleasure to meet with the youth who got expelled for justice and peace. Some of them are also heading to the WCC (World Council of Church Assembly) in Korea this November, where Gangjeong will hold a workshop and have a booth.

The generosity of this community reaches out and includes all peoples. It is a most alive and vibrant community living more than American militarism.

Inter-Island Solidarity for Just Peace: I hope that even though Jeju, Okinawa and Taiwan can form an independent league based on international agreement. Let’s prioritize to form a Demilitarized Inter-Island Peace Zone („ZIP‟) in Asia.

In September, the second anniversary of the completion of the construction fence around Gangjeong, the Gangjeong Peace Co-op held a re-opening ceremony at its office next to the Gangjeong Peace Center. Although the Gangjeong Peace Co-op was already running, its future direction and substance have been changed, leading to a re-launch. Originally established by activists to simply raise money for activist supporters and partners of the newly re-launched Gangjeong Peace Co-op at the opening ceremony. Several of its present leaders expressed concern and encouragement for him.

Before his arrest on Sept. 14, 2012, imprisoned for 144 days.

On Sept. 16, a Carolina believer and mother in her 70s was arrested, charged with hanging the arm of a policeman while the police forcefully removed protesters from the protest site. Before his arrest, a drunk construction worker had damaged a Carolina police car and then ran away into the naval base site. Her arrest happened as people were demanding an apology from him. She has been forced to remain in jail.

The indigenous people in Taiwan are Austronesian people, and share the same ancestors with others in Southeast Asia. Taiwan is the northern-most island for the Austronesian people’s sea migration, which Taiwan could be an interesting location for diversity. Some ancestors of the Teny in Laos came from Borneo Island in the Philippines, when they share a very similar language. When can these islands, go? The cry Gangjeong came to stand “Peace is the way!”

On Sept. 3rd to 9th. It included in Lewella, Kandy, Sri Lanka from the JPW network participants agreed to focus on the two issues of Militarization & Migration. It was held in the war-affected and highly militarized Northern Province.

The focus of the co-op is in an economic foundation, but hopes to involve more than American militarism.

TRIAL UPDATES

On Sept. 25, a male activist, Park Han-Bok was given a suspended sentence of 4 years while another activist, Jeong Danwoot was given a suspended sentence of 8 months with 1 year probation. On the same day, Mr. Park Seung-Ho, another male activist in his 40s was given a suspended sentence of 18 months with 3 years probation. He was arrested on July 31, 2012, the day of the ‘97 anniversary of the Korean independence.

In good news, a male activist, Ahn Gyun-je was not guilty on Sept. 12. He was charged with obstruction of Justice, Obstruction of Business, Violence, and Property Damage all for supposedly poking a policeman in the eye while being forcibly removed from a protest site in late last year. However it was found in court that another policeman had provoked the policeman in the eye. On Sept. 26, three male activists, Mr. Bae Gi-Chul, Hong Young-Chul, and Thae Jin Ofukh were also not guilty on appeal. A lower court had given the three activists the same charge, $2,500 each, but the higher court found there was no proof that the three committed obstruction of business in early 2012.