I feel that it was a well-made drama which was written, played and directed by the Jeju people. The Ministry of Defense mobilized a thousand of soldiers and thugs to destroy Gangjeong’s resistance camp at the military housing construction site, and gave us the ultimatum that it would come on Jan 31 to destroy the epicenter of the struggle. The crackdown was just 24 hours away, we had to do something to deter the thousand-strong army. However, there were only one hundred of us at the camp, so we built a tower on top of the village’s communal bus that had been parked to block the main gate of the military housing construction site. The make-shift tower was tightly welded to the metal gate. The new mayor, Cho, then went up the 20-feet tower to steer the resistance. He didn’t give us any order but stood at the top of the tower and maintained his position. This was just enough to keep us going in the struggle against the riot cops, thugs and the MoD soldiers, the trifecta of state capitalist oppression.

Frankly, not many of us believed we could defend the camp more than 3 hours. It was 100 of us vs 1,000 of them and to make matters worse, they were organized, trained gang members with a top-down structure of chain command who were in it for the money. In the meantime, we were just hot potato with belief and determination for peace. It was time for showdown.

What happened next? Incredibly, we were able to keep the resistance camp from getting destroyed for 14 hours. It was a small victory for the people. Some villagers were so overjoyed, screaming ‘we won’ in the air after the longest day of my life ended when the clock hit Feb 1. However, the rulers just couldn’t let the situation slide away like that because Gangjeong was again getting support and solidarity from all over, so the government needed to nip the high morale in the bud. The prosecutor’s office surprised everyone by seeking four physical detention warrants for Mayor Cho, vice-Mayor Koh and 2 other peace activists on Feb 2. Then a judge from Jeju District Court subpoenaed the four people for a hearing on the next day, Feb 3. We were all on edge, thinking we might lose the leadership of the struggle. But the village leaders didn’t do anything wrong but loved their pristine hometown so much that they even risked their lives to defend it from outside aggression. Miraculously, the conservative judge denied all detention warrants and the four were released from jail to come back to Gangjeong to be cheered and welcomed by fellow villagers. Yes, it was an unforgettable victory for the people and the saga continues.
Proposed Petition: VFP-Korea Peace

The USA Veterans for Peace—Korea Peace Campaign* proposed a petition with the title “Negotiate with North Korea on Its Offer to Cancel Nuclear Tests.” This petition urges the US to negotiate with North Korea on its recent offer to suspend its nuclear tests, in exchange for the US cancellation of large-scale joint war drills with South Korea that are planned for this year. As of January 30 a total of 3304 have signed this petition, which will continue until February. A US citizen who signed the petition expressed: (http://www.veteransforpeace.org/our-work/vfp-national-projects/korea-peace-campaign), “Sixty-five years of military buildup and sanctions have not made us safer or addressed our human rights concerns. It’s time to stop the military exercises. We must suspend the provocative military exercises in exchange for North Korea’s offer to cancel the nuclear tests.” According to the KCNA, the North Korean news agency, the DPRK’s message stated that if the United States “contribute(s) to easing tension on the Korean Peninsula by temporarily suspending joint military exercises in South Korea and its vicinity this year,” then “the DPRK is ready to take such responsive step as temporarily suspending the nuclear test over which the U.S. is concerned.” However, it is reported that the U.S. State Department rejected the offer on January 10, claiming that the two issues are separate.

“Korea Peace Campaign is a national project of VFP whose mission is to achieve a peaceful end to the lingering, costly Korean War, heal the wounds of the War and promote reconciliation and friendship between American and Korean people.

The full Petition:

“The US Should Negotiate with North Korea on Its Proposal to Cancel Nuclear Tests in Exchange for a US Suspension of Joint Military Exercises with South Korea. The DPRK government (North Korea) disclosed on January 10, 2015 that it had delivered to the United States the day before an important proposal to “create a peaceful climate on the Korean Peninsula.” This year, we observe the 70th anniversary of the tragic division of Korea in 1945. The U.S. government played a major role in the arbitrary division of the country, as well as in the horrific Korean civil war of 1950-53, wreaking catastrophic devastation on North Korea, with millions of Korean deaths as well as the deaths of 50,000 American soldiers. It is hard to believe that the U.S. still keeps nearly 30,000 troops in South Korea today, even though the Armistice Agreement was signed in 1953. According to KCNA, the North Korean news agency, the DPRK’s message stated that if the United States “contribute(s) to easing tension on the Korean Peninsula by temporarily suspending joint military exercises in South Korea and its vicinity this year,” then “the DPRK is ready to take such responsive step as temporarily suspending the nuclear test over which the U.S. is concerned.” Unfortunately, it is reported that the U.S. State Department rejected the offer on Jan. 10, claiming that the two issues are separate. Such a quick turning of the North’s proposal is not only arrogant but also violates one of the basic principles of the U.N. Charter, which requires of its members to “settle their international disputes by peaceful means.” (Article 2(3)) To reduce the dangerous military tensions on the Korean Peninsula today, it is urgent that the two hostile States to engage in mutual dialogue and negotiation for a peaceful settlement of the lingering Korean War, without any preconditions. The North’s proposal comes at a time of increasing tensions between the U.S. and DPRK over a Sony film, which depicts a brutal CIA-induced assassination of the current North Korean leader. In spite of the growing doubts by many security experts, the Obama administration hastily blamed the North for the last November’s hacking of the Sony Pictures’ computer system and subsequently imposed new sanctions on the country. Pyongyang proposed a joint investigation, denying its responsibility for the cyber-attacks. The winter U.S.-ROK (South Korea) war drill usually takes place in late Feb. DPRK put its troops on high military alert on such occasions in the past and conducted its own war drills in response. Pyongyang regards the large-scale joint war drills as U.S. rehearsal for military attacks, including nuclear strikes, against North Korea. In the last year’s drill, the U.S. flew in B-2 stealth bombers, which can drop nuclear bombs, from the U.S. mainland, as well as bringing in U.S. troops from abroad. In fact, these threatening moves not only provoke the North but also violate the Korean War Armistice Agreement of 1953. Instead of intensifying further sanctions and military pressures against the DPRK, the Obama administration should accept the recent offer from the North in good faith, and engage in negotiations to reach positive agreements to reduce military tensions on the Korean Peninsula. It is high time for the American people to heal the old wounds in Korea by ending the lingering Korean War with a peace treaty, so that the Korean people can also enjoy, at last, their basic human rights to peace, self-determination, and development. The least the United States can do now is to accept the North’s moratorium offer and enter talks on it. Engage DPRK and stop demonizing it, for the sake of peace in Korea, Northeast Asia and the world.”

Image source: Choe Hyo-Young. The Daebok-ho incident on Dec. 28, 2014

Damage to Fishermen

A naval base breakwater is currently being built on the sea next to the small fisherman’s port. The changes in current and filling up of earth and sand caused by construction makes the mouth of the port narrow and threatens fishing ships’ entry and exit to the port. On Dec. 28, a 5-ton fishing ship ‘Daebok-ho’ set sail around 2:30am was hit by a wave breaker built by the Navy. The ship began to sink and could barely return back due to a major rupture on the bottom of its hull. The Gangjeong Ship Owners’ Association has demanded numerous times that the Navy take safety measures, but the Navy’s response has been extremely irresponsible. According to Kim Young-Woo, the owner of ‘Daebok-ho,’ after the incident the Navy said that they would consult their insurance company but offered no response beyond this. The Navy only recently added lighting to the site where the accident took place. Accidents are also caused by construction barges whose anchors are not visible. “By principal, you cannot settle a barge down on a sea route as this narrows the route and disables a fishing boat’s navigation. It (the navy) only shamelessly says that it has no budget in response to our demands to move the wave system.” Due to base construction, Gangjeong fishermen’s current income has been reduced by one third when compared to 2013.

Henoko State Violence

In 2014 election in Okinawa, all candidates appealing for the US to get “out of Henoko (no more base expansion)” were victorious, including the Naha City mayor, prefecutral governor and for the national parliament. The popular will for “All Okinawa” was clearly expressed. However, Abe’s “devil regime” which is advancing Japan as a war nation, mobilized the whole police force from late night Jan. 10th until the next morning. The police violently oppressed the residents’ opposition activities and brought in material and heavy equipment to reclaim Henoko. One person was arrested and many injured. On the Sea of Henoko, residents have repeatedly been subjected to violent behavior such as the maritime security agency gangsters attacking canoes and causing broken ribs, cervical spine damage and sprains and pressing peoples’ heads into the sea. Residents have been holding 24-hour sit-in protests in front of Camp Schwab and continue to conduct boat and canoe protest activities on the sea. A rented bus runs daily from the various parts of Okinawa to Henoko bringing 200~300 people to gather in front of the gate. From Jan. 22 to 24, representatives at the national, prefecutral and primary government level all gathered in Henoko and held a sit-in rally, claiming that there is “no need for a military base in Okinawa, its time for growth full of self-esteem and richness.” It is estimated that 200 people attended over the three days, followed by another action to surround the Parliament in Tokyo. For peace, human rights, the environment and to chase the US military out of East Asia, let’s hold hands together even more firmly then before!

International Solidarity

Image: By Brian: Kathy Kelly, Art Laffin and Brian Terrell, who all visited Gangjeong separately in recent months, send solidarity to our friends there from Washington, DC, where we are fasting and acting with Witness Against Torture to close the prison on Guantanamo. Kathy began a 3 month prison sentence on Image 28, a 5-ton fishing ship ‘Daebok-ho’ set sail around 2:30am was hit by a wave breaker built by the Navy. The ship began to sink and could barely return back due to a major rupture on the bottom of its hull. The Gangjeong Ship Owners’ Association has demanded numerous times that the Navy take safety measures, but the Navy’s response has been extremely irresponsible. According to Kim Young-Woo, the owner of ‘Daebok-ho,’ after the incident the Navy said that they would consult their insurance company but offered no response beyond this. The Navy only recently added lighting to the site where the accident took place. Accidents are also caused by construction barges whose anchors are not visible. “By principal, you cannot settle a barge down on a sea route as this narrows the route and disables a fishing boat’s navigation. It (the navy) only shamelessly says that it has no budget in response to our demands to move the wave system.” Due to base construction, Gangjeong fishermen’s current income has been reduced by one third when compared to 2013.

International Solidarity
Realizing the Island of Peace

January 27, 2015 marked the 10th anniversary of Jeju being designated the “Island of World Peace.” To commemorate this date, 21 NGOs from all over Korea including the Gangjeong Village Association, who have been engaged in the Anti-Jeju Naval Base Movement, gathered together for a press conference. They emphasized that “Jeju Island shouldn’t be the base for the expansion of armaments but the crossroad for reconciliation.” To realize this, “Gangjeong has to become a Life and Peace Village in order to let world peace begin from here”, and, “together with villagers, citizens, and global citizens, through solidarity from the bottom up between peace lovers, we will realize the island of peace,” they said during the press conference.

In regards to the Gangjeong military housing issue, Gangjeong Mayor Cho, Kyung-Choel asked, “If the Jeju government is powerless to negotiate with the navy, please stop being dragged away, and just let Gangjeong take the lead. We have been struggling for more than 8 years; won’t we be able to fight for another 10 or 100 years?” After the press conference, a workshop was held to evaluate the past 10 years and to discover a way forward for the future. Prof. Ko Chang-Hoon from Jeju University suggested petitioning the US congress to form a joint Korea-US committee for the healing of Jeju 4.3 since we must have an international foundation as we continue to work for a resolution. Also, to keep and inherit the peace in Gangjeong, the situation of which is now considered a second 4.3, he suggested proposing to the Jeju and central governments that they establish the “Gangjeong International Peace Graduate School” inside the village to be run jointly by the village and research institute of Jeju University. Then Prof. Ko Chang Hoon emphasized that this school should include an environmental policy, for example the policy of the UNEP, to promote the environment and peace at the same time.

In addition, Jan 27th was also the 3rd anniversary of the independent declaration of “Jeju, The Demilitarized Island of Peace” by citizens. In order to change the reality of a fake “Island of Peace” coexisting with a military base to develop the economy, people gathered and named themselves “People for Jeju, Demilitarized Island of Peace.” Gathering under this name, a meeting was held in which a future plan was discussed. Furthermore, a movie about women was shown and women’s role in the peace movement and daily life was discussed. Furthermore, to memorialize the anniversary of Jeju, “The Demilitarized Island of Peace, citizens from Korea and around the world including the US, Sweden, Okinawa and Taiwan sent us peace messages through words, videos, and drawings. Using these peace messages, we made a video which was published on Youtube and presented during the press conference.

Different frontlines for Life and Peace

“We want to hear about Gangjeong’s struggle story and try to understand what they think is needed to live for the life and peace village.” This is not a very special request for Gangjeong Peace Tour, so I brought these visitors to the peace center so they could hear the struggles history of the naval base construction, then to participate in the Catholic mass, human chain and dance the Gangjeong addictive dance. Then to the protest tent in front of the military dormitory and the seaside to see the disturbing destruction of the sea. Finally I brought them to visit the “Gangjeong TongMul Liberary” and “Peace Book Cafe” run by the Gangjeong Book Village Team.

The general-secretary of Gangjeong Book Village Team welcomed us, and was kind to share their stories and answer questions. The committee members of this team are mainly formed by Gangjeong original villagers. The team was initiated to create a chance for people to meet each other no matter whether they are pro-base or anti-base. If you are partially aware of the Gangjeong story, you may know what it means here. It indicates the unspeakable suffering of a broken community during the struggle against the naval base. However, it has shown that the financial situation and achieving the goal of peace are both difficult. One of the difficulties is that most of the villagers in the Gangjeong Book Village Team used to have an anti-base political stance in the past, so “it’s easy for other villagers to think that this project must be something done for anti-base purposes, so it is still hard to create a space for pro and anti-base villagers to meet together.”

Interview with a Gangjeong Villager

I come from the mainland but moved to Gangjeong before my children were born. I loved my life here. Before the naval base, I led a peaceful life with peaceful mind and peaceful home. I still think that the best decision I made in my life was the move to Gangjeong. Our family has been talking about moving out for quite a while, but I don’t want to. My children were born and grew up here. As children they used to play and bathe in Gangjeong River, and I always enjoyed watching them. I didn’t want to them to leave their hometown. I’ve saved a piece of land here for my children to settle on, but I’m having a hard time persuading my married son to do so now. I don’t want to bequeath this unstable life to them.

I used to walk along the path on Gureombi Rock holding hands with my daughter. I still cannot forget those moments when I felt like a movie heroine standing on the rock looking out over the ocean as the sun set. Even now just looking at the photo of the rock I feel its immense tenderness. But for a long time now I have been suffering from the sound of construction at night, especially the sound of an explosion almost every five minutes. I can’t imagine how much louder it will be once the military housing construction begins. I sincerely hope that the military housing construction will be stopped.

I’m quite an outgoing person. I’ve always liked to socialize with other women in the village including the pro-naval base people. It’s been 8 years since our conflict began and we are still left wounded and distant from each other. I sometimes greet Haenyeo (women divers, who are mostly pro-base in Gangjeong) but they don’t respond. I don’t hold personal grudges against most of them, but I’m afraid to display my affection to them in public, because my action might generate rumors among the anti-base people and I could be ostracized. But toward some pro-base people I still feel strong resentment and find them unforgivable. I’m forever grateful that many internationals have visited Gangjeong to support us. We’ve struggled to stop the construction of the naval base and at times it felt like we were winning thanks to the solidarity from many different groups of people. Unfortunately, we couldn’t stop the base, which makes me feel sorry for those who came to support us. In 2015 I just hope to be able to continue to lead my small but honest life here, earning what I have worked for, gaining as much as I’ve tried, without harming others.

By Dong Won

By Emily Wang

By Grace

By Dong Won

Trial Updates

> On January 22, 2015 the Jeju High Court dismissed both appeals put forward by Reverend Kim Hong-Sool and his prosecutor. On January 10, 2013, Reverend Kim performed 100 bows alongside ex-mayor Kang Dong-Kyun and Reverend Choi Hun-Kook. The 1st court made handed down the decision that Reverend Kim Hong-Sool should pay a 3 million won fine (about $ 3000 USD) for the charge of obstruction of business (as it was argued that he obstructed the entry of construction vehicles) and obstruction of justice (it was argued that he interrupted the polices’ ability to stop them). These actions took place during the time when people were protesting the navy’s violation of the conditions passed down by the appearance of the Sewol ferry in the movie.

Image by Heo Chul- The recently opened documentary, “Mira Story(Known as ‘Torment in the Paradise’) is a travelogue on the Gangjeong peace book village project in 2013 before the Sewol ferry tragic incident in April 2014. It got great response from the villagers and viewers. However, the movie is in trouble to be shown in difficult conditions under the South Korean government oppression, probably because of appearance of the Sewol ferry in the movie.
Aotearoa’s Anti-Base Movement  
By Tom Rainey-Smith

The annual Waihopai spy base protest was held on January 24, 2015 near Blenheim, New Zealand. Around 45 people gathered outside the Ministry of Defence controlled property surrounding the spy base, one of three bases used by the US on Aotearoa New Zealand soil. The protest focused on its role in spying on citizens and gathering metadata on behalf of the NSA as part of the global ECHELON system run by the Five Eyes alliance (US, UK, Canada, Australia, NZ). Waihopai is believed to have been utilized as part of this program for the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Short statements were made by Anti-Bases Campaign organizer Murray Horton, former Green MP Keith Locke, current Green MP from Blenheim Steffan Browning, and Mana Movement member John Minto, amongst others. I made a short statement linking the struggles in Aotearoa and Korea and explaining the situation on Jeju. Activists jumped the fences on both sides of the main access road and planted signs calling for the closure of the spy base. A police van was parked nearby to block access to the site and a police officer was made aware of the protest activity. Despite the isolated location of the base between farmlands, the protest attracted some attention and was covered by Channel 3 News as well as other local media. While a much smaller struggle when compared to that being fought on Jeju, it is nonetheless an important one with its own history. In 2008, three protestors jumped the fence surrounding the Waihopai installation and successfully dented a rubber cover surrounding one of the two giant satellite dishes. Despite being arrested and charged, the three were finally acquitted after convincing the court that their action was for the greater good of society.

How You Can Help

1. Write a letter to the South Korean government to stop the Jeju base project and to the US government to stop the support for it.
2. Write letters to Gangjeong’s prisoners of conscience.
3. Stay updated by joining our Facebook groups and following us on twitter.
4. Organize a solidarity event (concert, movie screening, protest, etc...)
5. Then share about it on social media.
6. Visit Gangjeong!
7. For other ways to help and more visit us on the web.

For More Information

http://www.SaveJejuNow.org
http://www.facebook.com/groups/NoNavalBase
http://www.facebook.com/SaveJeju
http://www.twitter.com/SaveJejuNow

For Gangjeong related videos, visit savejejunow.org or check these Vimeo/Youtube users:

Vimeo: cho sung bong / DH Song / Regis Tremblay
Youtube: Gang-Jeong Il-Gi / Shalomsea / 1234yz100 / Sungbong2012

We will continue

By Choi Hyea-Young

The annual meeting for the second anniversary of Gangjeong Friends was held successfully on January 17th. The meeting included a screening of a short video carrying messages of encouragement from our supporters, a presentation on our annual activity for 2014, a small concert, and a great vegetarian meal. As we look back at the past year, we come to realize and appreciate all the support, love and solidarity from numerous friends that enable us to do our activities such as holding candlelight vigils, hosting community movie screenings, doing our weekly Tuesday street promotion, supporting Gangjeong peace activists and Gangjeong villagers financially to a small extent, paying the printing and shipping costs for the Gangjeong English Newsletter, and so on.

We often ask those questions to passerby during the weekly Tuesday street promotion. “Have you heard of the suffering that Gangjeong Villagers have gone through for the past 8 years?”, “Jeju Naval Base is not only a cause of suffering for the people of Gangjeong. If it is finally built, it could become the grounds for bringing an air base onto Jeju Island. Do you think people would still call Jeju Island the Island of Peace if this small Island had both a naval and an air base?” and “Have you ever agreed as a Jeju Islander that Jeju Island should be militarized?” No one has offered an answer to these questions. But we say: “Never!” Sometimes we get disappointed and discouraged and feel like a burden on such a long journey of struggle. Yet we will keep asking questions to people this year as well. As long as we encourage each other and stand shoulder to shoulder, we will not be knocked down. Rather, we will fight persistently in the same place we stand right now. We will continue into the New Year, 2015 as well. Thank you!