Gangjeong awarded the IPB Peace Prize

The International Peace Bureau awarded the Sean MacBride Peace Prize to the Gangjeon villagers from Jeju Island, South Korea, for their profound commitment to peace and the continuous resistance to the construction of a naval base on the island.

On October 23rd, Ko Kwon Il (Go Gwon Il), co-vice mayor of the Gangjeon village and co-vice chair of the Villagers’ Anti-Base Committee, traveled to Italy to receive the Sean Macbride Peace Prize awarded by the International Peace Bureau, one of the oldest foundations of peace. The award is dedicated to a “person or organization that has done outstanding work for peace, disarmament and/or human rights.”

For 2015, the Bureau awarded the people of Gangjeong Village the distinguished medal of peace along with people of Lampedusa, Italy. It is truly an honor for the villagers to receive this award, a validation of the struggles that Gangjeong has fought and have been supported through by the international community. This recognition also serves as a beacon of hope and support against the troubles that are to come once the naval base construction is completed.

Vice mayor Ko emphasized that the Jeju Naval Base has become a big concern to the peace of North Asia region and to the world. He also appealed to the international community to continue to be aware of and support the peace movement in Gangjeong.

On the day, the vice mayor’s speech was followed by a screening of ‘Ghosts of Jeju’ by Director Regis Trembl. The day that vice mayor Ko attended the ceremony to receive this award it was officially the 3102nd day of struggle since the Gangjeong Village created the villagers’ anti-base committee on May 18, 2007.

Peace activist Choi Sunghee said “I hope this good news can be a turning point for residents and peace activists living in Gangjeon to be encouraged and empowered. I believe this peace prize is awarded not only to Gangjeon Village but also to all those people who are opposing military bases around the world.”

The International Peace Bureau (IPB) founded in 1891, is one of the world’s oldest international peace organizations. The organization was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1910 for acting as a link between peace societies across various countries.

4th year anniversary of Catholic Solidarity

To commemorate the 4th year anniversary of its launch, ‘the Catholic Church Solidarity to Make Peace on Jeju Island’ offered a life and peace mass on 12 October in front of the Jeju naval base construction gate. It was October 2011 when 3,735 priests and believers gathered to pray for peace on Jeju and throughout the world and launch the Catholic Church Solidarity to Make Peace on Jeju Island.

The solidarity group is composed of various Catholic groups, including 15 Committees of Justice & Peace Archdiocese nationwide. This humble group has built solidarity with the villagers and peace keepers of Gangjeong in an effort to share suffering with them. It was through the mass run in front of the Jeju naval base construction gate on Mondays and Tuesdays, which this group was in charge of, where the committee connected with the community.

Even though the military base construction may reach the stages of completion, the hearts of us who visited the village for the first time in the name of Catholic solidarity will not be changed. We will, above all, continuously remind ourselves of the reasons of our first steps to Gangjeong four years ago.

We believe that the strength of this movement has been mostly thanks to the power of the village community. As we know, peace is the way, and we will walk alongside the villagers towards peace.
Gangjeong Solidarity with Other Grass root Movements

The wounded know the other wounded people’s pain. As the Gangjeong villagers have become our uncles, the discharged Ssangyong workers have become our brothers and comrades. We call Miryang elders our grandmas and grandpas, and the mothers of the Yongsan and Sewol tragedy have become our neighbors.

When the Miryang elders came to Gangjeong for their Jeju peace trip they sat alongside the Catholic priests and sisters in front of the base construction gate.

Mr. Kim Deuk-Jung, a laid-off worker and the head of the Ssangyong Motor branch under the Korean Metal Workers Union, recently carried out 45 days’ hunger strike. The people in Gangjeong were sure to video chat with him when we couldn’t travel the far distance between him and us, and were sure to also visit him in person at his fasting location.

Then there is the situation faced by workers at Colt/Coltec Inc., a company which used to produce guitars. The President of Colt/Coltec Inc. unjustly dismissed its workers, moved the company overseas after and proceeded to close down the company. The workers of Colt/Coltec Inc. have struggled longer than 3000 days.

Recently, Kim Moo-Sung, a representative of the conservative ruling party made ludicrous statements, that Colt/Coltec is a case that a militant labor union couldn’t travel the far distance between him and us, and were sure to also visit him in person at his fasting location.

As of October 30 he had been fasting for 26 days. When we sent him photos of us holding signs in support of him, we were remembering his participation in our struggle against military residence construction early this year, which resulted in his arrest. Each of the movements in Gangjeong, Miryang, Ssangyong and Colt/Coltec could be a lonely island, but with warmer friendship and stronger solidarity, those islands have gradually grown.

Palestinian Activist Visits Gangjeong

On October 14, Palestinian youth activist Karam ran a nonviolent direct action workshop and lecture in Gangjeong on the current situation in Palestine. He was visiting on what was discovered was his birthday in solidarity with the struggle which he also documented through his photojournalism.

Karam has extensive experience training international activists in nonviolent direct action tactics and techniques and he shared some of these with those who attended the workshop. The type of violence faced by Gangjeong villagers differs from that faced by Palestinians living under Israeli military occupation, but it was clear that local activists are very experienced in using nonviolent direct action tactics.

Following the workshop, Karam gave a talk about a village where he has worked as a medic for many years called Nabi Saleh in the occupied West Bank and a general update on the struggle against Israeli military occupation which has noticeably grown in its intensity in the past month, with more than 70 Palestinians killed in October alone.

Karam is a coordinator with the International Solidarity Movement and was invited to Korea by Palestine Peace and Solidarity in South Korea (PPS) using a local government grant awarded by the Seoul Youth Hub.

While these events were part of a larger speaking and training tour that Karam subsequently conducted across Seoul, his trip highlight was spending time in the village in which he was warmly welcomed. During his talk, he discussed the warmth of Palestinian villagers of Nabi Saleh, who welcome solidarity protestors into their homes every Friday morning around the time of their regular protests. Karam drew a parallel between the warmth and generosity of Gangjeong villagers and those of Nabi Saleh.

Days before he departed from Korea, he learned of the death of another friend named Hashem Azzeh, this time killed by Israeli military tear gas inhalation in Hebron.
Buried cultural relics are discovered at naval base, again.

Archaeological artifacts have been discovered once again at the new entry road of the Jeju naval base construction site. The research and excavation project commenced in November 2014 by the Jeju Archaeology Institute and will continue until December 2015. Recently, ceramic tools and house sites have been discovered and the relics date back 2,000 years to the Bronze age.

As we all remember, massive amount of cultural relics were found at the designated military base area in September 2011, right after the navy set up fences to seal off the Gangjeong shore and Gureombi rock. Back then, we hoped the newly unearthed prehistoric remains could possibly scrap the base construction plan because experts on artifacts stressed that the Gangjeong area on southern tip of Jeju Island had similar archaeological significance as prehistoric site in Samyang-dong on Jeju's northeastern coast. According to an established theory of how humans first arrived on the island, logical explanation was that they came from Korean peninsula and thus they first settled in northern shore of Jeju as Samyang has traces of the earliest settlers. However, the first excavation of Gangjeong village might have contradicted this theory if the area had not been cut off by barbed wires. The experts couldn't access the whole area, and the relics were buried sporadically.

Even after these discoveries the excavation process in 2011 was approved to continue and important history was deleted. At this time it was seen as just a formality, but now we have a second chance. The experts are saying it is still too early to tell what results the unearthing investigation can bring. They will decide what to do with the relics after a consultation meeting. But we cannot depend on academics to defend this important cultural heritage. Once again, the people's history is being annihilated. We need to remember the military base is being built on our history.

Preparing for the Long Defeat: Please Come visit Gangjeong

“Being a peace activist is not easy,” said Marco a member of the international team, whose bilingual abilities enables the Japanese speaking world to receive up-to-date news about the Gangjeong struggle. His words had a revolutionary ring, as though he was only now realizing he was involved in an impossible task.

In 2012, I found out there was a tiny island that was resisting the construction of a massive naval base. While it seemed obvious to oppose such a large scale military presence in a rural area, I was less concerned with political opinion towards militarism than I was with the acts of daily resistance. These acts of bowing and sit-ins, the human blockades, impressed upon me a form of human resilience. Three years later, I arrive on Jeju Island for the first time to partake in these acts of protest. The activists, artists, and locals gathered in Gangjeong year-round opposing operations that enable both humans and machinery to take away lives. The Gangjeong resistance is multifaceted. Even though the most obvious actions are those of physical protest, behind the scenes, programming, outreach, and self-care have sustained the resistance eight years and counting.

There is much to do in Gangjeong, and I urge readers to consider making a trip to Jeju. Spending time on the ground as both an active learner and participant has taught me much more than the importance of both civic participation and anti-militarism in order to sustain life. Being physically present amidst the naval base resistance has altered my vision of the world to receive up-to-date news about the Gangjeong struggle.
“Who profits from war?”

By Bokhee

An international seminar titled “Who profits from war? - Ways of resistance to stand against the war industry” was held at Seoul Women’s Plaza over two days, October 16th and 17th. Many peace activists from different parts of the world gathered to educate one another on the structure of the military-economic cycle which is closely related to everyday lives of ordinary citizens. This included not only arms and armies but also ammunitions, transportation, food, cleaning, translation services and private security services. There were workshops to share activists’ experiences such as creating and carrying out a strategy campaign, research methods of war-beneficiaries, direct actions for resistance, etc. and discussions seeking plans for international solidarity that resist against war-profiteering were also discussed. After the seminar, the participants went on to prepare for the protest confronting the ADEX arms exhibition which opened on October 19th along with other various campaigns. I travelled from Gangjeong Village to participate in the Seminar and protest.

I always thought of my peace activities as a passionate hobby, but meeting the peace activists from Seoul and many other countries during this seminar has strongly motivated me. I believe that sharing our experiences of resistance activities, which could be greatly empathized across many different countries and circumstances, was a huge encouragement for all the activists involved. Many people came to participate in the workshop that Palestinian activist Karam and I hosted. Many international activists were interested in the Gangjeong struggle after they were introduced to it by activists from ‘World Without War’, with some who had already came across Gangjeong’s news via social media. I hope this I can take this experience of resistance activity practice and the information from the seminar and have a positive influence on Gangjeong’s naval base opposition movement.

Photo Studio in Gangjeong

By Choi Sungku

Long ago in the past when digital cameras weren’t common, people used to go to photo studios to take family photos for special occasions. These occasions included graduations and other family celebrations.

Photographer Lee Woo-ki, Noh Sun-Tak, Jeong Tak-Yong and Park Sueng-Hwa joined us from Seoul and made a temporary photo studio on the second floor of the Peace Center. Some of photographers recorded villagers’ regular lives in Gangjeong village. They also participated in sailing for fish with Miryang’s fisherman brothers and took photos in the middle of Gangjeong Sea to capture their lives in the sea. They also took a family photo for us on October 24th in the Saint Francisco Peace Center.

Over 30 families and friends came to the studio to have their pictures taken. Some of them arrived alone while others came with family or friends. One elderly villagers Mr. Yoon (Sang-hyo) came with 10 family members who live in Jeju city. They received a large family picture. Gangjeong elementary school kids came to take pictures with friends. Many peace activists as well enjoyed special photo sessions with friends, some of the photo sessions included our little old dog which is considered a family member. Photos will be printed in approximately 2 weeks and handed to everyone.

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

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