

International Students Demand an End to the Jeju Naval Base Construction Project

As international students studying in South Korea we write to collectively the Government of South Korea to stop all work on the Jeju naval base construction project immediately. We have come to South Korea from all over the world with an interest in this country's long and hard fought democratization and had intended to return home with many positive lessons to share. However, as students concerned with peace, human security and democracy, we feel that this history is being jeopardized by the construction of the Jeju naval base.

We are deeply concerned after learning that the Jeju naval base construction project has been pushed forward by the government without proper democratic consultation despite a sizable body of evidence showing that the project is deeply flawed and that the public has been repeatedly misled. Not only have many flaws and inconsistencies been identified with the project plans which show that ships using the base would interrupt four preservation zones including a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and a Natural Memorial Site, but it was also heavily criticized in an independent environmental impact assessment carried out in conjunction with Greenpeace East Asia in which it was found to be putting at risk endangered animals and protected soft corals. The South Korean Navy also revealed that its plans were drawn to standards that would accommodate a U.S. aircraft carrier.¹

A wide range of human rights abuses against peaceful protesters are taking place on a daily basis in order to ensure that the construction goes ahead despite strong local opposition. These have already been well documented by a number of human rights organizations both in South Korea and around the world.² Amnesty International expressed concern in its 2012 Annual Report over the high number of arrests and the Supreme Prosecutors' Office labeling the protests "a challenge to state power".³ More recently, the United Nations Special Rapporteurs on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression (Frank La Rue), rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association (Maina Kia), and on the situation of human rights defenders

¹National Network of Korean Civil Society for Opposing to the Naval Base in Jeju Island et al. "Missing Democracy, Human Rights and Environment at the World Conservation Conference." People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy. September 17, 2012:

http://www.peoplepower21.org/index.php?mid=Peace&search_target=tag&search_keyword=statement&listStyle=list&document_srl=954317.

²Asian Human Rights Commission. "South Korea: Case of Gangjeong - Good example of worst governance." January 16, 2012: <http://www.humanrights.asia/news/ahrc-news/AHRC-STM-012-2012>; Forum-Asia. "South Korea: Open letter to President on construction of naval base and arrests of demonstrators in Jeju Island." March 21, 2012: http://www.forum-asia.org/wp/wp-admin/uploads/Korea_2012-03-21_Open_Letter_Naval_Base_Jeju-FINAL.pdf.

³Amnesty International, 2012. *Annual Report 2012: the state of the world's human rights*. <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/south-korea/report-2012>.

(Margaret Sekaggya) have written to the South Korean government alleging acts of harassment, intimidation and ill-treatment of peaceful protesters in Gangjeong Village. The letter calls on the South Korean government to guarantee the rights and freedom of all those involved in exercising their right to the freedoms of assembly and expression to protest the construction of the naval base and to prevent such violations being repeated.⁴The South Korean government has still not responded to these concerns. These concerns were echoed by France and Poland on October 25, 2012 during the most recent United Nations Universal Periodic Review of the human rights situation in South Korea.⁵

Considering the fact that this project was in theory designed to increase security on the Korean peninsula, it is very troubling to learn that the local community immediately surrounding the base project construction site, is being not only destroyed physically, but that millions of dollars have been spent on maintaining a police presence in the area. The once peaceful and prosperous seaside community of Gangjeong is now falling to pieces as the very foundations of its livelihood, the water and the land, are being destroyed. Since August, 2011, 128,402 policemen have been dispatched to Gangjeong Village (an average of 352 policemen each day) during which a total number of 493 persons have been prosecuted out of a total of 586 arrests made in this period (84.1%). The cost of maintaining this presence during this period amounts to 4.18 billion won.⁶This has had a heavy toll on the local population, with the majority of the villagers now suffering from a range of mental health disorders.⁷

Lastly, we are very concerned that the Jeju naval base project will not only contribute to the further militarization of the region, but will also increase tensions and add to regional insecurity. The new U.S. Asia-Pacific military strategy called the 'Pivot to Asia', which will dispatch more than 60% of the U.S. fleet to the region, has expanded the strategic importance of the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean under the excuse of supporting the 'peaceful rise of China'(which many have considered a 'containment' strategy) and fortifying the US alliance with India. Having interpreted China's active engagement with such nations surrounding the Indian Ocean as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, and Cambodia in the operation of 'the Ring of Pearls' as an anti-access and access denial strategy (A2/AD), the U.S. are responding with their 'Hub and Spoke' strategy which aims to consolidate to an even a greater extent their existing

⁴AL G/SO 214 (67-17) Assembly & Association (2010-1) G/SO 214 (107-9)KOR 2/2012: [https://spdb.ohchr.org/hrdb/21st/Public_-_AL_Rep_of_Korea_30.05.12_\(2.2012\)_Sup.pdf](https://spdb.ohchr.org/hrdb/21st/Public_-_AL_Rep_of_Korea_30.05.12_(2.2012)_Sup.pdf).

⁵People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy. "South Korea: Need to show more commitments to improve its human rights: A Joint Commentary by the Korean NGO Coalition for the 2nd Cycle of the UPR on the Republic of Korea." *Asian Human Rights Commission*, October 31, 2012: <http://www.humanrights.asia/news/forwarded-news/AHRC-FST-048-2012>.

⁶강홍균 "강정마을 진압에 육지경찰 12만명·41억원소요" 경향신문 2012-10-15: http://news.khan.co.kr/kh_news/khan_art_view.html?artid=201210151559061&code=950313.

⁷Save Jeju Now. "A villager, Yoon Chung was released from the 44th days in jail." Save Jeju Now: <http://savejejunow.org/a-villager-released-from-jail/>.

alliances with Japan, Korea, Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand, and about creating military ties with non-traditional allies such as India, Vietnam, Singapore, and Indonesia.⁸The Asia-Pacific Peace Declaration for No Naval Base in Jeju Island strongly states that living peacefully without being caught up in war and conflict is everyone's individual and collective right.⁹ We look with hope to Okinawa, the Philippines, Guam, and elsewhere where important people's movements continue to resist the militarization of the Asia Pacific region.

As students learning about the importance of the values of peace, human rights, social justice and cultural diversity, we cannot conceal our disappointment and indignation towards those responsible for the continuation of the Jeju Naval Base construction project. We hereby strongly urge the South Korean government and legislature to:

- Stop all construction on the Jeju Naval Base project immediately; Guarantee the human rights of Gangjeong villagers and peace activists including the rights to freedom of assembly and expression, a clean environment, and peace;
- Adopt all recommendations made by the Gangjeong Village Association, Jeju Pan-Island Committee for Stop of Military Base and for Realization of Peace Island, and the National Network of Korean Civil Society for Opposing to the Naval Base in Jeju Island concerning the forced construction of Jeju Naval Base in Gangjeong Village;
- Adopt all recommendations made by the Gangjeong Village Association, Jeju Pan-Island Committee to Stop the Military Base and for the Realization of Peace Island, and the National Network of Korean Civil Society for Opposing the Naval Base in Jeju Island concerning the forced construction of Jeju Naval Base in Gangjeong Village;
- Adopt the recommendations made by the international organizations including UN Special Rapporteurs, Asian Human Rights Commission, Forum-Asia, etc. to adhere to international human right standards and protect the livelihood of the inhabitants of Gangjeong Village;
- Cut all funding allocated for next year's budget for the Jeju naval base construction project, and finally start looking for proper measures to restore the ecological and human communities in and around Gangjeong Village.

⁸F. William Engdahl, "Obama's Geopolitical China 'Pivot': The Pentagon Targets China", Global Research, August 24, 2012'

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/obama-s-geopolitical-china-pivot-the-pentagon-targets-china/32474>

⁹National Network of Korean Civil Society for Opposing to the Naval Base in Jeju Island."Asia-Pacific Peace Declaration for No Naval Base in Jeju Island International Action Week." People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy, September 9, 2012:

<http://www.peoplepower21.org/English/947445>.

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International students & academics demanding an end to the Jeju Naval Base Construction Project

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