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## **Women's International League for Peace and Freedom turns attention to U.S. base relocation at Henoko**

by Nicholas Armin-Lemon

Women of the Japan section, Kyoto branch of The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) are making an effort to expand the reaches of peace activism. Increasingly, peace activists can be seen surrounding one of the many peace memorials or major thoroughfares throughout Japan. WILPF in Kyoto functions to help fill the ranks of such groups and raise awareness among locals.

WILPF was founded in The Hague, Netherlands in 1915, originally as the International Women's Congress. WILPF currently has 37 sections with regional branches around the globe that lobby for reform and mobilize to protest specific areas of contention. Their international secretariat is based in Geneva, Switzerland. The international president of WILPF, Dr Kozue Akibayashi, currently leads their efforts and also participated in Women Cross DMZ in 2015; where thirty women from 15 separate countries successfully traversed the deadly demilitarized zone (DMZ) between North and South Korea.

"WILPF has been working tirelessly for over 100 years to stop war and to create a peaceful world," said Akibayashi. "We have addressed 'root causes' of war such as militarism, patriarchy, or all forms of discrimination by being connected to feminists around the world. "WILPF's primary mission in Japan is to bring an end to sexual violence by U.S. soldiers within host communities of U.S. military bases."

But WILPF's international president also maintains her responsibilities abroad. She recently revisited her efforts in Seoul and is now in a WILPF conference in Sonoma, Calif.

The Kyoto branch of WILPF is currently taking issue with the new construction of embankments off of the coast of Henoko, Okinawa. Although the plan to relocate the U.S. Marine Corps Air Station from Futenma to Henoko is generally reported around mainland Japan, mainlanders are known to avoid political issues altogether. For residents of Okinawa, this disconnect can be crushing, figuratively and literally. One prominent and elderly women's activist, Suzuyo Takazato, had her ribs crushed in a scuffle with riot police during a protest for the demilitarization of Okinawa in April. WILPF, Kyoto branch is taking direct measures to assist Okinawan activists like Takazato.

"WILPF Kyoto has been working to stop the the U.S. military-build up in Henoko together with feminists of other countries particularly where U.S. military has been stationed for many years," Akibayashi said. "We are deeply concerned about the violation of the rights of the people living near the military bases."

Akibayashi explained the fervor of Okinawan residents. "The Okinawan people call for the withdrawal of the U.S. Marine Corps from Okinawa to start with. The characteristic of the bases in Okinawa is that they have hosted the largest number of U.S. Marines outside of the United States."

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Concerns about the base relocation span from prolonged militarization to the environment. For the prefectural government of Okinawa, displacing the coastal population of *Stylaraea punctata* coral was a cause for concern. Okinawa's prefectural government halted the efforts of their Defense Bureau until they find a way to prevent possible water pollution. In June, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe spoke at the Peace Memorial Park in Itoman City in commemoration of the Battle of Okinawa. There he urgently cautioned against repeating the horrors of war. He pledged to reduce the burden of Okinawa, but like Okinawan residents, WILPF members doubt Abe's intentions.

"The U.S. Marines have been there since 1953 and have been engaged in many wars waged in Asia and beyond by the United States. In other words, the Okinawan people are directly affected by the wars waged by the United States through the presence of the U.S. Marine Corps," Akibayashi remarked.

The international president of WILPF is currently directing all of the above activities out of Doshisha and Ritsumeikan Universities in Kyoto. The group has undertaken the daunting task of eliciting a response from mainland Japanese people towards peaceful goals. With these goals in mind they also seek cooperation and dialogue with people around the world.