

Petition Concerning
Futenma Air Station, Okinawa

Submitted to
the United States Government
by
Mayor Yoichi Iha
and
the City of Ginowan, Okinawa, Japan

July 2005

THE CITY OF GINOWAN
1-1-1 NODAKE, GINOWAN CITY,
OKINAWA, JAPAN 901-2710

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Petition

To:

We profoundly appreciate your tireless dedication to solve various issues between the United States and Japan.

United States Marine Corps Futenma Air Station was constructed on local residential lands expropriated by US forces at the Battle of Okinawa in 1945. Sixty years since then, it has occupied the heart of Ginowan City and has been used as a US military facility, imposing a heavy burden on the people of Okinawa.

Since Futenma Air Station is surrounded by congested residential areas, aircrafts cannot land and take off without flying over the populated city. The citizens of Ginowan City are forced to live in constant fear of aircraft crash and are exposed to severe noise pollution. In addition, frequent incidents and accidents by US military personnel have greatly damaged on life of the people of Okinawa.

In order to protect lives and property of its citizens, Ginowan City has demanded the immediate closure of Futenma Air Station and the return of its land. We are convinced that the ongoing US forces transformation process is the best opportunity to attain our objective and have taken every measure to achieve that, including the Ginowan delegation's lobbying tour of the United States last year.

Unfortunately, last August, a USMC helicopter crashed on the campus of Okinawa International University, adjacent to the air station. This single disaster is clear evidence that this base has

posed a great risk to the citizens. The danger has been frequently pointed out.

On September 12, one month after the crash, at the citizens' protest rally, around 30,000 people, far greater number than we anticipated, stood up against the crash and cried for their desire for the immediate closure and return of Futenma Air Station.

We sincerely ask for your understanding of the Okinawa's strong desire and the suffering caused by the US military presence, as well as for your special consideration for the prompt resolution of the problems stemming from Futenma Air Station.

Respectfully submitted,

YOICHI IHA
Mayor
City of Ginowan

Objectives

The immediate and complete closure of Futenma Air Station and return of its land without conditions of relocating its functions within Okinawa.

At the Special Action Committee on Okinawa (SACO) on December 2, 1996, both the United States and Japanese governments agreed to return Futenma Air Station within five to seven years contingent upon the completion of an alternative facility in Okinawa. The promised return, however, has not been actualized and the current relocation plan has stalemated because of the strong opposition to the construction from various citizens' groups inside and outside Okinawa.

Since the SACO agreement, circular training flights over residential areas day and night have increased each year. The citizens of Ginowan are forced to live in constant aircraft noises and fear of crash.

Many have repeatedly expressed their concerns about the danger posed by Futenma Air Station because of its questionable location and the nature of military operations.

The last August a USMC CH-53D heavy transportation helicopter crashed and burst into flames in Okinawa International University. Miraculously no local residents were injured by the crash. However, property damages in the neighborhood were severe and mental sufferings of the residents were immeasurable. This crash highlighted the urgent need to eliminate the danger by closing Futenma Air Station.

At the citizens' protest rally in the following month, over 30,000 protesters expressed their anger against the crash. In addition, in May, 2005, more than 23,000 participants formed a human chain surrounding Futenma Air Station with their strong desires for the prompt return of the base land. Such demands have grown day by

day.

Vast majority of the people of Okinawa strongly oppose the relocation of the functions of Futenma to other facilities within Okinawa, including the planned offshore heliport in Henoko, or Kadena Air Base. Both the US and Japanese governments should recognize that these proposals are unacceptable to the people of Okinawa.

In response to US Department of Defense's recommendation submitted to its Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission on May 13, Ginowan City sent a petition to US Congressional members whose districts might be economically affected by the BRAC process, requesting for special consideration for the possibility of accepting the functions and the personnel of Futenma Air Station.

We would like to ask for your understanding of the sincere desire of the Ginowan citizens who have carried the burden resulting from the presence of US bases for more than half a century. To have Futenma Air Station remain in this congested city endangers lives of the citizens, which might harm the US-Japan security alliance. We sincerely request the US government to discuss the Futenma problems within the context of the ongoing talks between the US and Japanese governments, seeking the actualization of relocating Futenma Air Station to the United States.