

August 13, 2019

Statement Concerning the US Military Helicopter Crash at Okinawa International University

On August 13, 2004, a US military helicopter crashed and burst into flames, throwing students, teachers, and local residents into a state of panic and fear. The intense rage that Okinawan residents felt about the tragic crash and the US handling of the accident has unfortunately waned with the passing of time. However, we cannot allow our memories of the US helicopter crash to fade. We vividly recall the anger we felt, and renew our demand for the closing of Futenma airbase, a demand we have made repeatedly since the incident. With strong resolve, I hereby state our demand and announce the opening of this gathering for demanding the closing of Futenma Base and for teaching future generations about the preciousness of peace.

Of the total area of US military facilities in Japan, 70.4 % are concentrated in Okinawa, which comprises a mere 0.6% of Japan's territory. Numerous accidents involving the US military have made clear that the bases are a threat to Okinawan safety, peace, and security. Such incidents make clear that the US military base is dangerous.

The Japanese government, including the Prime Minister, has promised on countless occasions to reduce Okinawa's military base burden. However, the situation with Futenma airbase, located in the middle of Ginowan City, not only hasn't been improved, but has been made more dangerous due to the use of aging helicopters and Osprey aircraft, whose defects have been pointed out, and which fly over residential area while emitting excessive levels of noise and low-frequency sound. Furthermore, the Japanese government's persistence in pursuing the construction of a new base at Henoko—in spite of strong opposition from the Okinawan people—has only further eroded our trust.

Okinawa International University was founded in the spirit reflected in our motto of “Striving for Autonomy and True Freedom,” a goal that Okinawan people have pursued throughout Okinawan and Ryukyuan history. In this spirit, we have striven to be rooted in the community and open to the world. Our desire for safety, peace, and security is a desire shared by all people, transcending all creeds and beliefs. The university and the local community cannot accept the continued presence and permanent establishment of Futenma airbase, which threatens our peace and tranquility. The removal of Futenma base has been agreed upon by the Japanese and US governments, and is strongly desired by everyone living in Okinawa.

We again strongly demand that the Japanese and US governments immediately close and remove the extremely dangerous Futenma airbase. At the same time, we hope to make the entire world aware of Okinawa's strong desire for peace.

Okinawa International University
President and Chair of the Board of Directors
Eiken Maetsu