

The Okinawa Peace Prize Fraud

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By Medoruma Shun

Medoruma Shun is a novelist and critic living in Nago City, Okinawa. Born in Okinawa, he graduated from the University of the Ryukyus. Medoruma is a novelist and a vocal and piercing critic of Japanese neo-nationalism, local pork-barrel politics, and the US military presence in Okinawa, particularly the plan to build a new marine airbase off the coast of Henoko in Nago City, where he resides. His story "Droplets" (Suiteki), for which he received Japan's Akutagawa Prize, is available (http://www.uhpress.hawaii.edu/cart/shopcore/?db_name=uhpres&page=shop/flypage&product_id=1552&category_id=b3e6237d1b1b3b8594488ed1c40d0dfb&PHPSESSID=f7eeb6c1a6170880ef6e906a1acd6ec9) in Michael Molasky's translation in Michael Molasky and Steve Rabson, eds., Southern Exposure: Modern Japanese Literature From Okinawa.

In recent years, Okinawan peace activists have fought the attempted relocation of Futenma Marine Air Station to the relatively pristine coral reef off Henoko, demanding instead a reduction in bases on Okinawa.

On July 3rd, Inamine Keiichi, Governor of Okinawa Prefecture, announced that the non-governmental organization "Peshawar-Kai" had been selected as the first recipient of the Okinawa Peace Prize. "Yes, just as I expected," I thought, as I heard the news.

Following the formation of the selection committee with Esaki Reona as its chair, I had thought about who the recipient would be. The name that first occurred to me was Peshawar-Kai. I had great respect for its dedicated efforts and achievements in Afghanistan over the past eighteen years. I had also been moved by the writings and speeches of Dr. Nakamura Tetsu, who represents the group.

In January this year when Dr. Nakamura spoke at Okinawa

University, an overflow audience is reported to have assembled. Since last year's 9/11 incident, the dangers associated with American military bases have been brought into relief afresh. At the same time, a support system for British and American "counter attacks" in Afghanistan has begun to be prepared. In the midst of this, I assume that many of those wishing to hear Dr. Nakamura in person realized, as residents of an Okinawa that is a military stronghold for U.S. forces, that what was happening in Afghanistan was not unrelated to themselves.

For such people, I wonder what this award to Peshawar-Kai meant. I wonder if they were able to rejoice unhesitatingly. For myself, I cannot suppress the misgivings and unpleasant feelings rising in my chest. This is not because I don't value the activities of the Peshawar-Kai. Rather, the more highly I value them, the more unbearable I find the fraud of an "Okinawa Peace Prize" that seeks to politically manipulate our respect for their activities.

The fraud I speak of is the deception of Governor Inamine who pretends to be the sender of a peace message, even as he promotes the "relocation within the prefecture" of Futenma base and Naha Naval Port, and actively supports the military activities of U.S. forces and Japan's Self-Defense Forces throughout the Asia-Pacific.

It was impossible for an individual or group, likely to expose that deception, to receive the "Okinawa Peace Prize." While superficially feigning political neutrality, they would cleverly eliminate such individuals and groups. I had thought this even before the selection committee met. Clearly they would distance themselves from individuals and organizations directly engaged in anti-war, anti-base, anti-military activities. But how many individuals and groups carry out peace activities in the Asia-Pacific without confronting the U.S. military presence? Precisely because the difficulty of such a screening was well understood, the scope of potential recipients of the prize was expanded to include those who had contributed to peace through art and sports.

The Prize as an "Indulgence" for the Promoters of New Bases

A reader's letter to the editor that appeared in the Okinawa local paper in July expressed the desire for selection of the

first award recipient from within the prefecture. If the selection committee's discussion had been made public and an attempt had been made to solicit prefectural citizens' recommendations, the name of Ahagon Shoko, who passed away in March this year, would have been the first to surface.

However, the very lifestyle of Ahagon, who devoted his life to non-violent campaigns against military bases, brings into relief the fraud and political nature of the prize. This is not restricted to Ahagon. It was unthinkable to me that the prize would go to any Okinawa peace movement activist or organization. As long as they are not merely paying lip service to the concept of peace, those in the peace movement in Okinawa cannot avoid confronting the crimes committed by American soldiers and damages resulting from American military exercises. Not only can there be no ambiguity concerning the "relocation within Okinawa" of the Futenma base, but conflict will also arise over the political stance of the head of the Okinawa Peace Prize committee, Governor Inamine.

It is certain that the selection committee members also implicitly understood the political imperative for evading such situations. It must have been convenient for them that the activities of the Peshawar Medical Service roused sympathy and became a topic after 9/11. Even so, I wonder if they feel any shame-Governor Inamine, who not only supports the activities of the U.S. Army as it conducts "retaliation attacks" against Afghanistan, but even proceeds with the construction of a new base, and the members of the selection committee, who, knowing this, chose Peshawar-Kai. On the 29th, the eve of the announcement of the winner, the council deliberating on the Futenma base met at the Prime Minister's official residence and ratified the basic plan to locate an "army-municipal airport" with a 2,500 meter runway offshore Henoko in Nago city with a fifteen year lease. The wishes of

the citizens of Henoko were neglected as this plan took shape under the exclusive leadership of the government. In Okinawa, complaints and opposition to this decision are mounting.

Note the ingenious timing of the Okinawa Peace Prize, which was announced immediately thereafter. This transparent lie makes me feel like saying "Stop treating prefectural citizens as fools." On 30 August 2002, the award ceremony for the Okinawa Peace Prize will be held at International Hall in Nago city, the venue of the 2000 Okinawa summit. Following that, in September, this will be followed by an election for the Nago city council and election for the prefectural governor in November.

It is as simple as that. From the start of deliberations to its presentation, the schedule of this Okinawa Peace Prize was interlaced with the political agenda of the Japanese government, Governor Inamine of Okinawa, and Mayor Kishimoto of Nago city, all of whom support the relocation of military bases within Okinawa. The award ceremony will surely prove excellent campaign propaganda. I still respect Peshawar-Kai's activities, most importantly those of Doctor Nakamura. This does not mean, however, that I can forgive the media publicity on the award which disguises the fraud of Governor Inamine and others who plan to advance the construction of new military bases in Nago City, or the use of the Okinawa Peace Prize to act as their "indulgence."

Translated by Denman Globber, Konstantinos Papadakis, Tai Wei Lim, Yi Han Pei, Eng Kiat Yak, Masahito Ogasawara, Shirley Liang, and Meredith Dunne. Posted at Japan Focus on October 15, 2002.

For Nakamura Tetsu's talk accepting the 2002 Okinawa Peace Prize, see (<http://www.japanfocus.org/products/details/1782>) "Words on Receiving the Okinawa Peace Prize."