

Recent Events and Movement:

Protest against the series of Sexual Assaults by U.S. Soldiers

On October 14 2007, four marines from the US Marine Corps Iwakuni Air Station allegedly gang-raped a 19-year-old Japanese woman in Hiroshima City. The marines who left the victim crying in the parking area later claimed that the sexual acts were on mutual agreement.

This shocking event was followed by a rape case of a 14-year-old girl by a 38-year-old U.S. Marine in the city of Okinawa. The staff sergeant at Camp Courtney, arrested on February 11, denied raping the girl, saying he only forced her down and kissed her.

Further on February 20, another US military serviceman was accused of raping a 21-year-old Filipino woman at a hotel in Okinawa.

The series of sexual assaults by US soldiers, especially the attack against a 14-year-old girl, provoked grave anger in the small island of Okinawa, which bears 75% of the US military bases in Japan and has suffered from rape, murder and other crimes and accidents caused by the US military for the past six decades. Okinawan Women Act Against Military Violence (OWAAMV), a leading feminist group in Okinawa, expressed their sentiments in a statement that the existence of the military bases is the structural violence against women and girls. They called for closure of the bases and moving the US marines out of communities. Gabriella, a major feminist organization in the Philippines that had led protest actions against the 2006 rape case against a Filipina by US Marines in Subic, also raised voice of anger against yet another case of sexual assault by US military.

On the other hand, some in mass media openly attacked the girl for not being “well-educated,” shifting the blame on the victim rather than the perpetrator or the

Japanese and the US military authorities that have failed to prevent such crimes around the bases. *Sankei Shimbun*, a major daily newspaper, even accused the anti-military parties for “exploiting the case” in an editorial claiming that the girl herself is responsible for the crime.

Asia-Japan Women’s Resource Center (AJWRC) has led series of protest actions, including petition campaign, protest against insensitive media report, and organizing protest vigil, together with other women’s groups in communities hosting US military bases. In the evening of February 19, women in Okinawa and Tokyo held women’s protest vigil and gathering against the military bases and attack on the victims.

The series of the sexual assaults point not only to the nature of the military alliance that actually endangers safety of women and children, but also to the fundamental flaw in the Japanese criminal justice system. In the rape case in Hiroshima, while the Japanese Prosecutors’ Office decided to drop charges against the suspects without clarifying the reason in November, while the US military in Japan decided to



The protest vigil in front of the National Diet Building on Feb. 19 (Photo by Chieko Akaishi)

prosecute the perpetrators in the military court. The Okinawa Police Office also dropped charge against the Marine and released him on February 29, after the girl dropped the accusation against him, explaining that she does not want to be involved in the case anymore. In Japanese criminal law, public prosecutor cannot press charge of sexual crime when a victim does not wish to make

such a claim. As victims of sexual assaults are put under huge pressure and further suffering, their voices have been silenced and thus the US-Japan military alliance has been maintained. AJWRC renews its determination to fight against the military violence and the sexist criminal justice system, in close cooperation with sisters in the world.

**Impunity is NOT Acceptable!
We protest against HDPPPO's Decision
Not to Prosecute the Gang-rape Perpetrators**

The Hiroshima District Public Prosecutors' Office (H.D.P.P.O.) decided on November 15 to drop charges against four marines from the US Marine Corps Iwakuni Air Station, who allegedly gang-raped a woman in Naka district in Hiroshima City on October 14. As hope for a fair judgment on this case has been betrayed, we hereby express our grave doubt and concern over this decision. As a consequence, we demand that the H.D.P.P.O. and the Hiroshima Prefecture Police overturn this decision and be held accountable for how this unacceptable decision was made.

While initially intending to file extradition requests based on the Japan-US Status-Of-Force Agreement, the Hiroshima Prefecture Police changed its policy afterwards and continued an investigation without filing such requests. Deducing from this investigation process, we think it is extremely doubtful whether a fair investigation was carried out to bring those perpetrators responsible while taking the sensitive nature of sexual violence into consideration.

It is reported that four marines emphasized that their act was a result of a "mutual agreement." Despite this report, however, the alleged victim affirmed just after the incident that it was a gang-rape, and she has filed suit. She was in a car surrounded by four foreign men with whom she had just made an acquaintance. In other words, she was in a situation where no call for help was possible. A robbery was also committed. Considering the situation she was in, we are very suspicious of the fairness of both the decision by Hiroshima Prefecture Police not to request extradition of the four marines and the denial of the case's criminality by H.D.P.P.O.

A source of our suspicion lies in the fact that the various cases of sexual violence by American soldiers from the US base camp so far have not been penalized appropriately. Shielded by the Japan-US Status-Of-Force Agreement, so many alleged American soldiers have gotten away without punishment.

It is precisely a neglect of fair investigation and prosecution on the side of the Japanese police and prosecutors, which has allowed the existence of such impunity. For

example, in 2002, a woman was raped by an American soldier from the Yokosuka US base camp. Despite the reporting and accusation by the victim, the prosecutor's office dropped the case without any explanation, just as in the case of Hiroshima. Dissatisfied with this decision, the victim then filed a civil lawsuit and won the case. Today, the victim is demanding state compensation, in accusation of Kanagawa Prefecture Police's lack of consideration towards a sexually violated victim.

As for the Hiroshima case, Hiroshima Prefecture Police refused to provide a clear reason for dropping the case, giving "sensitive nature of the case." We contend that it should be possible for the H.D.P.P.O. to respond to public concern while paying good attention to the privacy of the victim.

We are deeply concerned that if the police and prosecutor's office are not held accountable, and American soldiers who committed heinous crime go unpunished, Japan's judiciary will lose credence, and women's human rights will be jeopardized. We therefore demand that Hiroshima Prefecture Police and the H.D.P.P.O. respond to our doubts and concerns, that they cancel their decision to drop the case and simultaneously bring the case to criminal court, and that they explain the investigation process to the public.

26 November 2007
Asia-Japan Women's Resource Center
and signed by 37 groups and 364 individuals

Mr. Yasuo Fukuda, Prime Minister of Japan
Mr. Masahiko Komura, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan
Mr. Shigeru Ishiba, Minister of Defense of Japan
Mr. George W. Bush, President of the United States of America
H. E. Mr. John Thomas Schieffer, Ambassador of the United States of America to Japan
Mr. Bruce A. Wright, Commander of the United States Forces Japan

We protest against yet another case of sexual abuse
committed by a U.S. marine!
We demand a fair investigation and punishment of the
perpetrators, and fundamental resolutions
to prevent violence against women and girls.

We are deeply shocked and feel unbearable anger over the rape of a 14-year-old girl by a U.S. marine in Okinawa on February 11. This is yet another brutal sexual abuse by U.S. military personnel following the cases in Okinawa and Hiroshima last October.

For the past six decades, we have witnessed countless cases of sexual abuse against women and girls around the U.S. military bases in Okinawa and other parts of Japan. Many of these cases were never reported. Many of these cases were never reported. Even when the

victims had the great courage to report these violations, charges were sometimes dropped. Many perpetrators received little or no punishment, thus blocked by the unequal U.S.-Japan Status of Agreement. The Japanese government has utterly failed in taking the necessary measures to prevent these crimes and has instead tried to silence voices of dissidence from local communities by increasing or decreasing subsidies to those local governments hosting the bases.

We say NO MORE. We cannot accept any plan of realignment and transformation of U.S. forces in Japan to strengthen the U.S.-Japan military alliance that leaves the human rights of women and girls and safety of communities in peril. We protest against the U.S. and the Japanese government for allowing yet another sexual abuse by the U.S. troops.

We demand that they:

1. Secure a fair and full investigation into the case and punishment of the perpetrator, while taking into consideration the sensitive nature of sexual crimes.

We are seriously concerned about the attempt to put the blame on the victimized girl. We will never accept any settlement to decriminalize the perpetrator for any "fault" of the sexual assault victim. We demand that bodily and mental care for the victims by experts with sufficient knowledge and experience of dealing with sexual abuse be provided, as well as appropriate support for the families. Also, a fair investigation into the cases should be conducted with severe punishments of the perpetrators. A sincere apology and compensation for the victims should also be made. Transparency and accountability of the cases should be ensured, while protecting the privacy of the victims.

2. Take all necessary measures to prevent crime around the bases in consultation with local governments, residents and civil groups

Mr. Komura, Minister of Foreign Affairs, still prioritizes the military alliance over the human rights of women by stating: "We would like to minimize the damage of the case as it is not good for Japan-U.S. alliance, considering sentiments of people." However, it is the military alliance that actually endangers women and girls. We demand that the Japanese government take all necessary measures to prevent crime, including a review of the U.S.-Japan Status of Forces Agreement and the creation of a plan of action. In doing so, it should make sufficient consultations with local communities and residents around the bases, as well as civil organizations and women's organizations.

February 14, 2008

Asia-Japan Women's Resource Center
Femin Women's Democratic Club
Women's Active Museum on War and Peace
and signed by 134 groups and 965 individuals