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Stop Depriving The Okinawa Dugong Of Their Feeding Grounds!  
Do Not Take Away Precious Coastal Waters From The Okinawa People!

The Association To Protect The Northernmost Dugong

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(This is an updated version of the original appeal, in Japanese, dated 2014/8/6.)

Team Zan, a group closely associated with ours, which studies the Okinawa dugong's behavior, requested on June 12, 2014, that the Okinawa Defense Bureau and the Department of Defense immediately stop operations related to construction of the new US military base in Henoko, Nago City, Okinawa, which are ruining the Okinawa dugong's feeding areas.

Team Zan conducted a series of field studies in Oura Bay and the waters off Henoko in May and June, 2014 and found, in total, more than 110 traces of dugong feeding near the US Marine Base, Camp Schwab. 'The Aquatic Fauna Study Report (in Japanese)' prepared by the Okinawa Defense Bureau also verifies that dugongs have been present in these water areas through 2012 and 2013. It is evident that the marine areas to be used for the new military base in Henoko are important parts of the habitat for the critically endangered Okinawa dugong.

The Environmental Impact Assessment for the new base construction, prepared by the Okinawa Defense Bureau, says that the dugongs stay mostly off the Kayo coast, distant from the construction site, and, as long as the dugongs remain away from the site, the construction would not cause a significant impact upon their lifestyle. However, the EIA's claim falls apart in face of the fact that the dugongs frequent the very areas designated for landfill for the base construction.

As a Natural Monument of Japan, the Okinawa dugong is entitled to a special protection. The ongoing disturbance of the dugong's habitat caused by the boring survey, the search for and disposal of unexploded ordnance in preparation for the landfill, and the base construction itself, will each seriously damage the seagrass colonies where the dugongs feed. The sea areas where many of the feeding traces have been found are part of the areas to be landfilled and some are located directly under the floating pier built by the Okinawa Defense Bureau and now frequented by the rubber dinghies used by the Coast Guard to forcibly remove canoe-borne protesters.

On August 17, 2014, a long line of buoys was laid to mark the newly established limited access area surrounding the construction site. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe says that this area is set aside for Camp Schwab use and that any trespasser shall be arrested. Amid protest, the boring survey has been carried out since August 18 inside the limited access area; 16 spots in the sea-bottom and 5 spots on land are to be excavated; the search for unexploded ordnance is to be carried out by ships and divers. Prime Minister Abe hopes to complete the survey by the end of the coming October so that the Okinawa Governor Hirokazu Nakaima, who gave his permission for the landfill, betraying his promise never to allow a new base in the prefecture, will be in a better position in the coming campaign in November for the prefecture Governor. The Okinawa Defense Bureau, the Prefecture Police Force and security guards are menacing the citizens who have gathered to protest in front of Camp Schwab. Corrugated iron plates with dangerous protuberances have been laid at the entrance to the Camp to intimidate the protesters. Non-violent protest, however, continues; 3,600 people gathered on August 23 demanding the immediate discontinuation of the survey. Nago City Mayor, Susumu Inamine, stands firm opposing the base construction and refuses to cooperate with the Okinawa Defense Bureau. On August 22, Naha City Council resolved to demand an immediate end to the base construction and related activities. The Ryukyu Shimpo, a leading newspaper in Okinawa, reported on August 26, that polls indicate that 81.5% of the people are opposed to the boring survey.

The planned landfill and fragmentation of reefs in the water off Henoko will be devastating to local fishing activities and other industries; Nago City and the neighboring Ginoza-son Fishermen's Cooperative oppose the plan. And yet, the Okinawa prefecture decided, on August 28, to permit the fragmentation of reefs.

Forcing through the base construction and related operations is a slight to the local authority and violates the rights to fish. Closing off the sea-areas disregards the law assuring public use of such areas.

Dugong is, as a species, endangered world-wide. The Okinawa dugong is an isolated population located at the northernmost region of its range. Climate change and continued development have devastated many parts of the Okinawa coast. However, the waters off Henoko and neighboring Oura Bay are still rich in wildlife; healthy seagrass colonies and beautiful coral reefs support marine ecosystem, precious sea-turtles and dugongs. These water areas are precious not only for the Okinawan people but also for the people of the world. The operations which endanger the surviving dugongs, a symbol of a healthy marine ecosystem, must be immediately stopped. Do not take away water areas precious for the people and future generations !