Greetings to everyone. My name is CHINEN Masayuki and I am a fourth-year student at Okinawa Christian University as well as founder and representative of the student organization, Team Ryūkyū.

Team Ryūkyū was founded to both put an end to the omission of Okinawan history in the educational wasteland of Japanese history and to call to task a Japanese education system that proceeds with a seeming lack of interest and participation in societal problems and politics. It is not easy for Okinawan youth to learn about their local history and issues. Our goal has been to provide interested students with a space where they are able to learn as well as an environment in which Okinawan phenomena can be passed on. Currently, we are conducting programs such as a national student symposium and guided field trips to battle sites. It was through encounters and experiences during these activities that we became convinced that it was essential to communicate the state of affairs in Okinawa to all Japanese, and so we decided to go on a nationwide tour.

Sadly, there is little coverage of the issue of Okinawa bases by either the regional or major media outlets. Even when covered, the information is often far from the actual situation, and at times the coverage is even arbitrary and the truth greatly distorted. For that reason, we set out on our trip with the thought that through talking with people, we would like them to recognize that the circumstances of Okinawa are not affecting some far off stranger, but this person right in front of them.

We have been using the title “Okinawa Now – Considering Peace” throughout this trip. Though I am sure we all understand the meaning of the words considering peace, have you ever really thought about the meaning of peace? Many people say the word peace, but what kind of society is that?
Under what definition of peace are they using the word? I think that most people in Japan today believe that it is a peaceful country. But is that really true?

In Fukushima, the problem of radioactive fallout has been abandoned with virtually no progress made, leaving some residents languishing without proper assistance. Somewhere nearly every day, hate speech is directed toward South and North Koreans residing in Japan. And, the criminal activities and accidents of U.S. military personnel have not ceased over the 69 years since World War II ended and U.S. bases were located in Okinawa. Can a society with social problems such as these and many people continuing to suffer, be described as peaceful? We would be speaking of an abstract and hollow peace. Well then, what is peace? What society is peaceful? Specifically thinking about these questions – that is “contemplating peace.” I would like to take this occasion to inform you about peace from the perspective of Okinawa.

Okinawa was originally called the Ryūkyū Kingdom, and was a prosperous country for a 450-year period from 1429 to 1879, at which time Japan invaded. The kingdom system was then ended through the abolishment of the Ryūkyū Kingdom and creation of prefectures, making Okinawa a part of Japan. However, despite saying that it was a part of Japan, Okinawans were not treated as equal Japanese citizens and became objects of discrimination, referred to as Ryūkyū savages and people of an inferior race. Of course, not only those from Ryūkyū, but also Ainu and other Asian ethnicities have been victims of discrimination. It was on this historical backdrop that the self-identity of Japanese as a superior race was established. And it was from there that inhumane acts such as invasion, massacre and human experimentation were repeated again and again throughout Japan’s wartime conquests. During its territorial expansion, the fires of war were also spread to Okinawa as a result of ultimately provoking war with the United States. Of Okinawa’s pre-war population, one in four residents lost their lives in the Battle of Okinawa. “Forced mass deaths” were ordered by the Japanese
Imperial Army and massacres were carried out by Japanese soldiers. After an incredibly tragic war, Japan was placed under American occupation as a defeated nation. In 1952, in order to be released from U.S. occupation, Japan offered over Okinawa, leading to the large concentration of U.S. military bases within the prefecture.

Okinawa has been forced to live alongside the U.S. military in an environment in which human rights and other freedoms cannot be protected. Land is forcibly seized, fatal vehicle accidents occur and even schoolgirls have been raped, but still American soldiers have not been properly tried. Many tears and much blood have been shed leading up to today. But despite it now being the 21st century, crimes and accidents still frequently occur. One example is the 2012 forced deployment of the MV-22 Osprey, a large transport aircraft, once again clearly showing the discrimination against Okinawa. In 2014, the most well-known issue has been the construction of a new U.S. military base in the village of Heneko in Nago, Okinawa Prefecture. No resolution has yet been reached since a 2004 - 2007 on-sea opposition movement to stop the seabed boring survey needed to prepare an environmental impact report. A thorough report was virtually impossible to conduct due to the intense opposition at that time. Nevertheless, the Japanese government announced that there was no cause for concern over environmental preservation and took a stance on forcing the base construction at Henoko. In the beginning of July this year, construction first started with the land portion of the base. Numerous protestors gathered at the base gate to stop the delivery of materials, showing their opposition to base construction along with repeatedly clashing with the police force and riot squad. In an attempt to intimidate the opposition movement, the government then set up a sharply pointed, wave-shaped length of sheet iron against the sidewalk where protestors assembled. The stance of a government to brazenly set up, against the public, a dangerous barrier that could cause serious injury, creates a situation that is completely removed from democracy.
By mid-July, construction proceeded not only on land but also on sea. And so, as in previous times, a small band of boats and canoes resumed its objections and opposition. To confront this, the government has used power and money to employ a structure of suppression. Nearby fishery cooperatives were bought off and the Japan Coast Guard was dispatched to, among other things, exert state power to remove protestors, creating a situation in which some were injured. Protestors were detained without any true legal basis. On top of that, even though there had been injuries, illegalities were left unaddressed and security patrolling simply continued unrestricted.

Many Okinawans are making strenuous efforts at Henoko every day – this is the present state of Okinawa. But this isn’t something that just started recently; Okinawa has been placed in this type of unjust situation going back to the 1879 Ryūkyū invasion. Nonetheless, there are many who automatically say that Japan is peaceful. But does Okinawa have peace while under these conditions? Japan has many problems: radioactive fallout in Fukushima; hate speech toward South and North Koreans living in Japan. By no means is a society with these extensive problems peaceful. So, what is peace? We must desire a concrete concept of peace; nothing abstract. And within that, there is something we must protect. I believe that is Article 9. Let the power of the people protect that which must be protected, change that which must be changed. That is democracy. Let us together build a society in which all life is respected.

Thank you very much.