

**Statement on the Fourteenth Anniversary of the US Military Helicopter Crash  
at Okinawa International University**

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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. Today, at the same spot and at the same time of day, we mark the fourteenth anniversary of that disaster. 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. Today, 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. This past December, the window of a Futenma-stationed CH-53 helicopter fell off mid-flight and landed in the playground of Futenma Daini Elementary School, located next to the base. Six days earlier, a similar accident occurred in which a part from the same kind of helicopter fell onto the roof of a nursery school. Given that these incidents occurred at schools, where children should be able to learn in a safe environment, and that one wrong move might have led to a loss of life, they were an enormous shock for children and their guardians, school personnel, and Okinawan residents. The crash of a Futenma-stationed Osprey aircraft off the coast of Abu in Nago City in December 2016, and last October's incident in which a military transport helicopter crash-landed and burst into flames in a grazing field in the village of Higashi, have reminded us of the tragic incident that occurred here fourteen years ago. In addition to these, there have been many other accidents involving US military aircraft, including emergency landings of Osprey at Amami and New Ishigaki Airports. 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.

Today, on the fourteenth anniversary of the helicopter crash at our university, 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.