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Statement submitted by YWCA of Japan, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

Statement

The YWCA of Japan is an international women's non-governmental organization working to create a peaceful society where women and children can live without fear or violence. In light of the main theme of Commission on the Status of Women 69, "Beijing+30," we wish to highlight the voices of the citizens, particularly women, living near U.S. military bases in Japan, who are especially vulnerable to harm from military forces. Under the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, the Japanese government has imposed the burden of U.S. military bases on Okinawa for many years. Even though more than 50 years have passed since Okinawa's return from U.S. control to Japan, U.S. military bases remain across the country, with 70.3% of them concentrated on the small southern island of Okinawa, which makes up only 0.6% of Japan's land area. Citizens on this small island are exposed to problems arising from the military bases, and their human rights are being violated.

In this statement, the YWCA of Japan will summarize and report the many issues concerning U.S. military bases from four perspectives, and we will present our requests to the Japanese and U.S. governments and the United Nations.

1. Accidents near military bases

Living near military bases means constantly facing militarized threats. Numerous accidents involving U.S. forces have been reported in Okinawa over the past 20 years. These include the crash of a U.S. military helicopter at Okinawa International University in August 2004, an MV-22 Osprey crash off Nago City in December 2016, and parts from a CH-53E helicopter falling on a daycare roof in December 2017, narrowly avoiding injury to 30

children. In addition, on December 13, 2017, a 90 square centimetre, 7.7 kilogram window from a CH-53E fell onto an elementary school playground, injuring one student. It is prohibited in the U.S. for military aircraft to fly over facilities such as kindergartens, elementary schools, and hospitals. These incidents show how Okinawan citizens' lives are often neglected and endangered.

Request:

- The Japanese and U.S. governments should grant Japanese authorities the right to control and investigate incidents like aircraft crashes, and the U.S. should be required to disclose information when requested by the Japanese government and the prefectures where the accident occurred.

2. Crimes by U.S. Military Personnel and Affiliates

During the U.S. occupation, many terrifying cases of sexual assault were reported, with victims including a nine-month-old infant. The protection of victims and the punishment of offenders, which should be "natural," are hindered by Article 17, Clause 5(c) of the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). In 1995, a brutal case involving the rape of a twelve-years-old girl by three U.S. servicemen, raised calls for the consolidation and reduction of military bases in Okinawa. A chronological record of "sexual crimes by U.S. servicemen" compiled last year by citizen groups, led by Ms. Harumi Miyagi, documented about 1,000 cases of such crimes occurring across Okinawa between 1945 and 2021. The number of documented cases continues to increase with each edition of the record. According

to the Okinawa Prefectural Police, over the past 51 years (from 1972 to 2023), a total of 6,235 criminal cases have been committed by U.S. military personnel and affiliates, with an increase in recent years. Due to the shame associated with being a victim, many sexual violence survivors remain silent, which leads to the assumption that the actual number of sexual crimes is likely higher.

Another issue is the underreporting of crimes by U.S. military personnel to the prefectural and local governments. For example, a sexual assault involving the abduction of an underage girl was not reported to Okinawa Prefecture until six months after the incident. Five sexual assaults from last year also went unreported in Okinawa, two cases in Kanagawa since 2021 were undisclosed. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Prefectural Police of Okinawa and Kanagawa emphasized "the protection of the victims' privacy" as the reason for not immediately reporting the cases to the prefectures. However, timely reporting to local authorities is essential for public safety and preventing future incidents. "Notification procedures in case of unusual occurrences related to the U.S. Forces in Japan" agreed upon by Japan and the U.S. in 1997, have become mere formalities.

Requests:

- The Japanese government should immediately notify prefectural and local governments when crimes involving U.S. military personnel occur in Japan, ensuring the protection of citizens' human rights and safety as enshrined in the Constitution.
- The Japanese and U.S. governments should amend Article 17, Clause 5(c) of the Status of Forces Agreement. Specifically, the agreement should clearly state that when U.S. military

personnel commit crimes outside of their official duties, Japanese authorities can detain them before prosecution, even if they are within U.S. military bases. Additionally, it should specify that whether the crime was committed "in the course of duty" is determined based on evidence by Japanese investigative agencies and courts.

- The United Nations should request both the U.S. and Japanese governments to take measures based on the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women , particularly General Recommendations 12 and 19, and the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993), recognizing violence against women as a societal and structural issue.

3. Noise Problems and Environmental Damage

In the Okinawa YWCA Newsletter (March 2019), a woman living in Ginowan City, home to Futenma Air Base, wrote the following:

Four years ago, I moved to Ginowan City and felt firsthand the noise, air pollution, and fear associated with the base. I was surprised to learn that flight training is allowed until 10 p.m., but I often hear helicopters even after that. The air pollution is palpable, and I often wonder if it's from more than just the nearby roads. The yellow stains on the walls and ceiling of my home aren't mold—they're oil. And whenever I hear the loud noise of a plane or helicopter, I worry about it falling from the sky. Even when I'm walking outside, I feel anxious every time I see a helicopter flying low.

Moreover, per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) contamination around military bases has raised environmental concerns. PFAS includes chemicals like perfluorooctanesulfonate (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoate (PFOA), which have been widely used. In December 2023, the World Health Organization raised its carcinogenic classification for PFOS and PFOA. PFAS is linked to various health issues, including dyslipidemia, kidney cancer, reduced antibody responses, and effects on infant development. PFAS has been detected not only around Futenma Air Station but also in the soil and sewage near U.S. military bases across Japan, including Yokota Air Base, which is increasing public anxiety.

Requests:

- The Japanese and U.S. governments should revise the SOFA to clearly state that airspace is not included under the “facilities and areas” provided for military use. The U.S. military should be required to obtain permission from the Japanese government to use Japanese airspace for training and exercises, with the dates and times of such use disclosed to the public.
- The Japanese and U.S. governments should amend the SOFA to address environmental protection and impose penalties for the release of hazardous substances. A bilateral agreement similar to the one in Germany should be established to share the costs of environmental cleanup.
- The United Nations should recommend that both governments revise the SOFA to include provisions for immediate reporting of environmental emergencies, in line with Principle 18 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992).

4. Henoko Base Relocation Issue

The relocation of Futenma Air Base to Henoko has faced significant technical and financial difficulties due to weak ground in the area, making the project nearly impossible to complete. The Okinawan people's opposition to the new base has been clearly expressed through multiple elections and a prefectural referendum, with over 70% of voters opposing the construction.

Requests:

- The Japanese government should immediately halt the Henoko relocation, which is contrary to the will of the people, as demonstrated in repeated elections and referenda.
- The United Nations should recommend that the Japanese government recognize the Ryukyu-Okinawan people as indigenous under the definitions of International Labour Organization Convention 169 and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007). The U.S. government should also be urged not to use indigenous lands for military purposes without their consent.