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Human rights bodies and mechanisms

Written statement* submitted by International Career Support Association, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[13 June 2019]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

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Okinawan people are not indigenous but Japanese nationals

I was born and raised in Okinawa, Japan. Now I live in California, United States of America. I am a Buddhist priest and stay neutral on political interests.

Okinawan people living in the US, they identify themselves with both Okinawan and Japanese cultures. They love Okinawa and Japan, in other words, having Okinawan ancestry does not override Japanese identity.

However, recently United Nations Human Rights Council reported to Japanese Government entity 5 times that Ryukyu or Okinawan ancestry people are indigenous. When I hear the news, I was shocked and would like to testify to UN HRC that such understanding is misleading and untrue.

I was born after WWII and Okinawa was under United States control while mainland Japan was not due to Treaty of San Francisco. This difference in treatment created some resentments for people living in Okinawa towards the Japanese government. However, even at such unfair time, people living in Okinawa did not think they are indigenous nor seeking independence from Japan.

Seeking to understand why UN suggested that Okinawans are indigenous, I came to the following points based on my research and experiences:

1. People who live in Okinawa, people who were born in Okinawa and live on mainland Japan or United States don't think nor identify themselves as indigenous.
2. The topic of Okinawans are indigenous or identified as such are only seen in the news, especially newspapers.
3. Okinawa prefecture government never brought up the discussion nor request to Japanese central government to recognize Okinawans as indigenous.
4. Okinawa prefecture government and its local municipals never had internal discussion/meetings on the topic of Okinawans are indigenous.

About the groups reported to UN that claim Okinawans are Indigenous:

Okinawan selected local officials never reported to UN on the topic of Okinawans being indigenous. Some unknown groups to the locals never gone through official process to ask local government to classify Okinawans as indigenous to UN. These groups went directly to UN without due process. I researched about which groups claimed Okinawans are indigenous to UN and their related activities.

I found the following 3 groups:

In Okinawa;

1. Association of Indigenous Peoples in the Ryukyus
2. Okinawa International Human Rights Law Study Group

Outside of Okinawa:

The International Movement against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism

Followed are my findings on their activities and credibility:

1) Association of Indigenous Peoples in the Ryukyus

Fact: I never heard of this group and people who live in Okinawa/general public never heard of this group or any of its related activities such as meetings, protests. Mr. Toma is the representative of this organization but no one local knows him.

Concern: To classify Okinawans as indigenous is not only a political discussion but also an identity issue to people who live in Okinawa and Okinawans abroad. Therefore, only one person or a few voices from this organization do not present the whole picture. For the claim to be valid, Mr. Toma needs to prove that majority of the Okinawa people are

concerned or believe they are indigenous. Without the consent of the Okinawa people, he should state that his claim is only his own opinion and it does not represent the whole Okinawa.

2) **Okinawa International Human Rights Law Study Group**

Fact: Same as the first group, no one in Okinawa knows about this group. Likewise, this group is not known in any of the Okinawa communities outside of Japan. I went to their web page, there is no contact information nor ways to interact. The group assumed position is that Okinawans are indigenous; therefore, their rights have been intruded which were included in their 2 reports to UN HRC on: 1) Okinawan people's indigenous rights; 2) Infringement of the autonomy right of the Okinawa people.

Concern: People living in Okinawa and Okinawans living abroad do not know about this group and their stands but the reports they made are on behalf of the people who don't know about the group.

3) **The International Movement against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism**

Fact: This group is active in Geneva involving human rights issue. However, no one knows about this group in Okinawa. In their web site it states that there is discrimination against some indigenous groups such as Ainu, Ryukyu/Okinawan people. However, Okinawan people don't feel like there is discrimination.

Concern: This group's understanding or classification of Okinawans as indigenous is not inline with locals or Okinawans. Before WWII, I heard about discrimination towards people living in Okinawa; however, it was not based on roots of being indigenous but a norm of preference of people living in the city versus less central locations. In Okinawan history, it never described any discrimination by the central government. This organization is reporting issues with assumption of the Okinawans identity as indigenous which will be disagreed by majority of people living in or from Okinawa. A small group of people should not decide Okinawan people's identity.

This organization has been trying to divide Japanese public opinion to weaken Japanese society with a certain ideology. Their main subject was Braku issue. Since I am not a specialist of this issue, I won't go into details, however, they succeed and have been getting a huge amount of the funding by exploiting the ignorance of the Japanese government. They are applying the same success strategy to many other areas for their monetary benefits. One of them is happened to be Okinawa. They are trying to divide Japanese public opinion by exploiting the United Nations.

Request for Recommendations to Japan Government

Current actions of Japan government

Japan government officially only recognizes Ainu people as indigenous. Okinawa people are saying to Japan government that they are not indigenous. Japan government's response to UN was weak because they did not research and provide history. The weak response caused confusion. Japan government has no plan to further research into the cause of UN's misunderstanding.

Proposals to the United Nations Human Rights Council.

We want United Nations Human Rights bodies to examine the credibility of the questionable organization in order to prevent the wasting of limited resources of the valuable United Nations.

Proposals to Japan government

- The government should have laws and procedures in place to verify the credibility of the organizations and validity of the reports they submit to UN to avoid a small group of people misrepresenting the majority
- Japan government should attest strongly to UN that Okinawa people are not indigenous based on research of Okinawa history.

- The Japanese government needs to pass a resolution that Okinawan people are not indigenous people.
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