

## East Asia-U.S.-Puerto Rico Women's Network against Militarism

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The East Asia-U.S.-Puerto Rico Women's Network Against Militarism was formed in 1997 when forty women activists, teachers, and students from South Korea, Okinawa, mainland Japan, the Philippines, and the United States gathered in Okinawa. Our purpose was to share information about the negative effects of the U.S. military in each of our countries, especially on women, children, and the environment. In 2000 we made connections with women from Puerto Rico who oppose the U.S. Navy's bombing training on the island of Vieques. We are working together as women because many progressive organizations do not have a strong gender analysis, even though women may be a significant part of the membership.

### MISSION AND PURPOSE

We are working to develop common consciousness, solidarity, and support, to be united in one voice to counter the effects of militarism and military values. We see militarism as a crucial aspect of patriarchal power, and global in its reach - intimately linked to the global economy. We share a commitment to understanding the connections among colonialism, nationalism, racism, sexism, classism, and militarism. We are learning from each other and are witnesses to each others' struggles. We acknowledge the importance of our connections, as individuals and organizations. Communication, interpretation, translation is a foundational element in all our work. We promote an alternative vision of genuine security, through education and practical projects. We seek to protect the rights of women and children, and environment affected by militarism. Through base conversion, we want to find alternative livelihood for women and civilians around the bases. We recognize that each region requires country-specific strategies.

### BELIEFS AND PERSPECTIVES

We believe that military security is an oxymoron. Military bases, operations, and budgets are justified in the name of security. Yet militarism is intimately linked to a culture of violence, including violence against women. In Korea, Okinawa, mainland Japan, and the Philippines, U.S. troops also rape and brutalize women from communities around US bases, or where US troops come ashore for "rest and recreation." We believe that violence against women is an integral part of all military attitudes, training, and culture. We uphold the rights of women and children, especially in marginalized communities, and oppose sexual exploitation in all its forms.

We recognize that the dominant political and economic system has created poverty and misery for many people worldwide and insecurity for everyone. Militaries generate profits for national and transnational corporations, and are poised to intervene when necessary to support "business as usual."

Military use of land for bombing training, weapons storage, refueling of planes and ships causes contamination of land, water, and the ocean, and affects the health of local people, especially women and children. In the United States, we link domestic and foreign-policy issues. Socially-useful programs have been cut while the military budget is growing -- \$369 billion budgeted for 2003 (excluding additional funding for the "war on terrorism"). Disproportionately, women bear the burden of these cuts, especially in communities of color. Many young people of color are drawn into the military as the only way to get health insurance, job training and further education. Taxpayers in Korea, Japan, and the Philippines also pay heavily for military training, weapons, and the U.S. military presence.

We focus on the U.S. military because of U.S. dominance in the world, the vast federal resources devoted to military spending, and because U.S. military bases and operations overseas often threaten host communities and seriously limit their self-determination. The U.S. military budget exceeds the total military expenditure of the next 12 biggest spenders put together: Russia, China, France, Britain, Germany, Japan, South Korea, North Korea, Libya, Syria, Iraq and Cuba. The cost of ONE B-2 bomber (roughly \$1.5 billion) could buy groceries for a year for 360,577 U.S. families. We argue that the whole idea of security needs to be de-militarized.

Genuine security, in contrast to military security, is based on four fundamental conditions:

1. the environment in which we live must be able to sustain human and natural life;
2. our basic survival needs for food, clothing, shelter, and health care must be met;
3. our fundamental human dignity, and personal and cultural identities must be respected; and
4. people and the natural environment must be protected from avoidable harm.

By these standards there are no truly secure societies in the world, and none that are fully committed to the process of de-militarization. This process includes the return of land used for bases to civilian use, and the conversion of our economic system that supports and requires militarism. It also includes the de-militarization of cultures and national identities. In many countries, masculinity is defined in military terms. We need a redefinition of masculinity, strength, power, and adventure; an end to war toys and the glorification of war and warriors. The process of de-militarization means developing non-military forms of strength to counter military threats and to deal with acts of violence. It involves sharing current knowledge and experiences of peaceful resolution to conflicts, and building on these efforts. It will involve more harmonious ways of living among people, and between people and the world that sustains us.

### PARTICIPANTS AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The Network is not a membership organization, but a collaboration among women active in our own communities. See list of affiliated organizations (below). Participants in our international working meetings include organizers, students, teachers, scholars, working women, elected officials, and survivors of violence. This includes women in their late teens/early 20s to women in their 70s. The core organizing group has representatives from each country group, together with interpreters. The Network is a project of the Tides Center, a non-governmental organization based in San Francisco.

### ACTIVITIES

All affiliated groups are involved in research, public education, protest, lobbying, and networking at regional and international levels. Local groups decide when and how to take up these issues in their communities. As a network we share information in an attempt to keep up with what is happening on these issues in all our countries.

#### Co-ordinated Day of Action

Network participants joined in a co-ordinated day of action in all our countries on October 6/7/8, 2002, the first anniversary of the beginning of the U.S. bombing of Afghanistan.

Our message: to oppose U.S. military intervention in Iraq, demand withdrawal of the U.S. Navy from Vieques by May 2003 as promised by President Bush, stand united for genuine security that protects us all, including women, children and the environment, and right to self-determination of Palestinian people.

Add our plans here: US-based members have planned to initiate and join activities from Seattle to Los Angeles including joining marches in Seattle, San Francisco, and LA on October 6.

#### International Working Meetings

The Network has sponsored four international working meetings so far, where women have come together to learn from each other and to discuss common issues: in Okinawa (1997, 2000), Washington, DC (1998), and South Korea (2002). The next meeting is tentatively planned for the Philippines in 2004. The meetings in Okinawa and Japan have also included site visits to U.S. bases, bombing ranges, or camptowns, and meetings with local activists. The Washington meeting included many small meetings with NGOs as well as a congressional briefing.

The international meetings are also an opportunity for public education. For example, SAFE Korea used the 2002 to share the work of Korean organizations in the context of more than 50 years of U.S. military occupation, in a divided country. The meetings draw on and strengthen local organizing and help us to make local/international connections.

#### Ongoing Solidarity

Activities that show solidarity in an ongoing way include letters to U.S. officials, and public responses to military decisions or actions of military personnel in our various countries. For example, we have written letters to Department of Defense officials, U.S. ambassadors to East Asia, and State Department officials protesting the rape and murder of women in East Asia by U.S. troops. We have also made some contacts with the few members of Congress who are sympathetic to our ideas.

In 2001, a small group from the United States traveled to Puerto Rico to learn about women's organizing work in Vieques first-hand. In 2002, activists from Korea and the Philippines have done some collaborative investigation and research into the situation of Filipinas who work in camptowns around U.S. bases in Korea.

The Network has sponsored participants to attend other international meetings and conferences, e.g. the Hague Appeal for Peace (May 1999) and the International Grassroots Summit on Military Toxics (Washington, DC, 1999).

#### Feminist Glossary

A feminist activist glossary of terms in English, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, and Tagalog. This comes out of our recognition of the serious language barriers to cross-national organizing and our commitment to work with women from many backgrounds, not only those who can participate in English. The dictionary project builds on the work of the interpreters who are part of the Network. We anticipate that it will be valuable to other organizations also.

#### Redefining Security

Activities of affiliated organizations are already contributing to what we see as a redefinition of security:

-The environment in which we live must be able to sustain life

The Filipino/American Coalition for Environmental Solutions (FACES) is a coalition of church, environmental, peace and justice groups; students, scientists, professionals, and other concerned individuals pressing the U.S. government to take responsibility for toxic contamination at former U.S. bases in the Philippines. FACES seeks to organize public support through information campaigns, network building, media outreach, and litigation. FACES works in coordination with the People's Task Force for Bases Cleanup, a non-government organization in the Philippines that has been advocating for clean-up of the former bases since 1994. Specific goals include:

The immediate protection of public health for the communities around Clark Air Base and Subic Bay Naval Facility.

A comprehensive investigation of the extent of contamination and the severity of health effects.

A thorough clean-up of the contaminated sites.

Medical assistance to and compensation for people with illnesses linked to military contamination.

A clean-up process that is transparent, with independent oversight and involvement of affected communities and non-governmental organizations.

-Basic needs for food, clothing, shelter and health must be met

In Korea, women organizing to support those drawn into the sub-economy of the military-base towns are developing alternative economic strategies.

In the late 1980's, women of Du Rae Bang (My Sister's Place) established a bakery as an alternative means of livelihood for former bar women. Through this small business, women learn new skills to enable them to become more independent of the bars. Similarly, Sae Woom Tuh started an herb project where women grow fresh herb plants and produce handmade items for sale, including potpourri, and cards and paper made from dried herbs and recycled milk cartons. Both groups organize bar women to make demands of the Korean and U.S. governments to address U.S. military violence against women and the needs of Amerasian children.

In Vieques, the Alianza Mujeres de Vieques formed in 1999 to address the impact of U.S. military presence and bombing practices on women in Vieques. Immediate and long-term needs include a shelter for victims of domestic violence, a health clinic for women, training women to provide health information to others in the community, particularly concerning cancer prevention. The Alianza develops and promotes women's leadership and supports women to become involved in elected and public office. The Alianza recently won a campaign to appoint a woman from Vieques to the Puerto Rico Commission on Women. In addition, the Alianza operates a conference/lodging center and meeting space that provides needed public and political space.

-Fundamental human dignity and personal and cultural identities must be respected

U.S. military men stationed in East Asia or passing through ports like Subic Bay (Philippines) for R and R (rest and recreation) have fathered thousands of Amerasian children. Their fathers abandon most of these children. They face discrimination in school and employment due to stigma, lack of education and training, and the absence of supports for poor families. The Movement of Fil-Amerasians for Social Securities (M.A.S.S.), a self-help group of Amerasian people in the Philippines, was founded in 2000 by a Filipina Amerasian. Its purpose is to bring together Amerasian Filipinos of all ages to deal with issues related to their identity, their place in Philippines society, and the discrimination they face. They seek to improve their conditions by organizing for change through education, consciousness-raising, lobbying government for legislative changes, and working with others to insure the dignity of all Amerasian people.

-Protection from avoidable harm

Following the rape of a 12-year old Okinawan schoolgirl by three U.S. servicemen in 1995, women in Okinawa established Okinawa Women Act Against Military Violence (OWAAMV) and then established the Rape Emergency Intervention Counseling Center (REICO). The Center provides a hotline service and counseling for victims of sexual violence. REICO staff members accompany women to report rapes or to seek medical care. REICO also organizes training sessions for police officers in how to conduct investigations of rape and other sexual violence in a way that supports and respects the victims. In September 2001, REICO won their struggle to allow a rape victim to give testimony via closed-circuit TV so that she did not have to face her attacker, an U.S. serviceman. In addition, OWAAMV has pieced together a record of U.S. military violence against Okinawan women dating from 1945, and documented incidents of military contamination of the environment. OWAAMV works through direct action, lobbying, and public education, and consistently connects militarism and violence against women.

#### **AFFILIATED ORGANIZATIONS**

Alianza de Mujeres Viequenses, Vieques, Puerto Rico

Asia-Japan Women's Resource Center, Japan.

Buklod Center, Philippines

Coalition against Trafficking in Women-Asia Pacific, Philippines

Du Rae Bang (My Sister's Place), South Korea.

Filipino/American Coalition for Environmental Solutions, USA.

Himawari (Sunflower), Japan

Institute for Latino Empowerment, Puerto Rico.

Korean Solidarity Committee, USA

Los Angeles Okinawa Peace Network, USA.

National Campaign to Eradicate Crime by U.S. Troops in Korea, South, Korea.

Okinawa Women Act Against Military Violence, Okinawa, Japan.

SAFE Korea

Women's Action for New Directions, USA.

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**Internet Resources**

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[safe.jinbo.net](http://safe.jinbo.net)

[www.uchinanchu.org](http://www.uchinanchu.org)

[www.viequeslibres.org](http://www.viequeslibres.org)

[www.wand.org](http://www.wand.org)

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