

Address at Peace Forum

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Thank you for inviting me to attend and address today's gathering of researchers from Japan, Korea and Taiwan; I could not be more delighted or honored. To begin with, Okinawa is situated in the heart of East Asia, and it enjoyed a golden age of prosperity, unparalleled in history, through its peaceful diplomacy as the Ryukyu Kingdom. Also, postwar Japan has achieved unprecedented prosperity by not waging war in over seventy years.

In 1458, King Shō Taikyū of the Ryukyu Kingdom recited at the Bridge of Nations Bell in Shuri Castle that "The Ryukyu Kingdom is in the winning place in the southern seas; it gathers the greatness of the three Koreas; it maintains good relations with Ming and with Japan — a dependent state of Ming, and having a close relationship to Japan; lying between these two, it is a bejeweled island springing forth from the ocean. Ships ply toward us from across the seven seas, bringing abundant foreign goods."

Firstly, the splendid cultural heritage built by our ancestors suffered widespread destruction during the Second World War. Seventy-two years ago, over the space of three months, Okinawa became the only battleground in Japan in which the local civilians were caught up in the fighting as the Japanese and American forces fought a battle to the death. After the Battle of Okinawa, the islands fell under American control for a period of twenty-seven years.

Secondly, when we think about the recent nuclear tests and threats emanating from the neighboring country of North Korea, we certainly cannot say that the situation in East Asia is progressing towards peace. It is thus highly significant that Okinawa, with its history of suffering, is holding a Peace Forum appealing for everlasting world peace, and here let me offer my respects to both the organizers and participants.

I myself have experienced at first hand that war is in no way creative or productive, but destructive. I knew that this destruction was underway even before the fighting began. Here, I mean the war preparations that we had to do. We were set to building anti-aircraft positions in Yomitan Village, which is now a World Heritage site. To make these positions, we had to destroy Zakimi Castle, which had been built over five hundred years before. Not only was this cultural heritage lost, but nature itself, the very ground, was destroyed and disfigured. Also, we lost our schooling. I was in first grade in secondary school at the time, but the Japanese army took over the school and the dormitories. We schoolboys were put to work building a military base, and study was out of the question for us. We were also drafted to tramp down the sugarcane fields to build Kadena Air Base, today the greatest airbase in the East. Our teens are the years when our thirst for knowledge is the strongest. Nothing can damage a person more than losing the chance to study at that time of life. And the schools taught people to fear what they called “the Anglo-American beasts.” When the Americans did land, this fear drove many people to take their own lives in mass suicides at the landing zones.

When the Americans finally landed, the prefecture’s secondary-school students were organized into “Student Units of Blood and Iron for the Emperor.” Units were set up at every school, and sent out to fight the Americans. The schoolgirls worked as military nurses also in school units. The girls’ unit that took the heaviest casualties was the Himeyuri Students, or Lily Corps. They were recruited from the Girls’ Normal School and Daiichi Girls’ Secondary School. A film was made about the Himeyuri Students, and their story is very well known. This tragedy happened right here on the soil of Okinawa — a tragedy of young lives cut down in the midst of their studies.

When I was a foreign-exchange student in America, I learned from a Korean student that the same kind of thing had happened in Korea. A group of civilians fleeing from the north to the south of the country were attacked and massacred by the North Korean Army as they crossed a bridge from one territory to the other. I have also been to the Marco Polo Bridge, where the Second Sino-Japanese War was triggered, and I visited the war museum there. There I learned about an incident that happened during the Japanese Army’s attack on Nanjing. While the Chinese troops fled in boats across the Yangtze River, the civilians who had gathered on the bank had nowhere to run, and they died in great numbers in the Japanese assault. I understood very well that the army will not protect the people, no matter which country they are fighting for. It was the same here in Okinawa.

Before the Americans landed, their ships bombarded the Japanese Army’s positions. When they came ashore, the land was laid waste to the last blade of grass. An unthinkable total of over two hundred thousand precious lives were lost. When I was at the war museum in Nanjing, I came across a book called *An Outline of History of China*. According to this, homes were burned

and pillaged, and women were subjected to rape. What happened in Okinawa happened there. It is reported that three hundred thousand Chinese lives were lost, both military and civilian. Could any action be more inhumane, and more careless of human life? The massacre at Nanjing happened when I was in second grade at primary school. We were told nothing about it. Instead, we held torchlight parades to celebrate the Japanese Army's victory. Drunk with the fervor of war, we chanted "*Banzai!*" many times in celebration. My friend Jeanette K.Fink, who later served as head of education in the United States Civil Administration of the Ryukyu Islands, told me that she saw these events with her own eyes.

Not all problems will come to an end if war becomes a thing of the past. I have been to places where people don't have enough to eat, sleep on the grass, are thin as ghosts, suffering from malaria, and dying one after another.

We who have experienced war know how destructive it is, how inhumane it is, and our memories will never fade. We will hand down our memories to the next generation, and I pray that our memories will build an everlasting peace for the world, and that all the peoples of the world, regardless of nationality, may enjoy lives of happiness. To justify the decision to fight, Japan's declaration of war against the U.S. and Britain included the phrase "to enjoy prosperity in common with all nations."

In other words, the cause was presented as just, but I pray with all my heart that coexistence and co-prosperity in the true sense of the phrase can be achieved. I hope that this Peace Forum will contribute to the everlasting peace of not just of East Asia but of the entire world. Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen.

