

THIS BEAUTIFUL EARTH: PHOTO ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA OKINAWA'S 'MONUMENT TO WORLD PEACE'

Okinawa is beautiful. A “land of light.” Each time I gaze up at the brightness of the blue Okinawan sky, I think of the day when, instead of an early summer breeze, a brutal gale of steel and lead filled the air.

I think of the day when the blue waters seemed to groan under the immense weight of 1,500 battleships, and of the summer when the blue-green mountains were leaden with destruction.

Japan had used Okinawa as a shield to protect its main islands from enemy attack, casting it off and assigning its inhabitants to death.

Okinawa's people were offered up alive for slaughter, and the island echoed with screams of hellish agony. In payment for its sacrifice in the Battle of Okinawa, the island was made into a nuclear airbase after the war. The “Monument to World Peace” is a huge concrete mass, 92 feet long and nine feet high.

It was once a launch-site for American Mace-B nuclear missiles. Twenty-four such missiles were deployed at this site, a single one capable of delivering a warhead with the destructive power of the Hiroshima bomb. Within their range was every major Chinese city. Any one of these missiles could have reached Beijing in an hour and a half.

It was a base capable of executing a horrific war — a crystallization of humanity's inner darkness.

What if the funds, the know-how, the human resources and energy employed to build this base of war had been used instead to build friendships? What if the effort required to prepare for the threat of war had instead been directed at creating bonds of trust that could do away with that threat?

From that day, the world would change completely. All depends on whether humanity has such courage.

From the vantage point of Okinawa, Japan's true nature is clearly visible. The kind of heavy pressure that disregards basic human rights continues today. Is it permissible for Japan to continue forever treading upon the people of Okinawa, who have already shed so many tears of misery? Can it be called democracy when a selfish majority persists in sacrificing those in a weaker position than themselves? To enjoy security built upon the victimization of others is a shameful thing for a human being. It is criminal.

Japan can only be called just when it exerts itself body and soul to transform Okinawa — to turn it from a place that has witnessed some of the greatest misery of the 20th century, to a place of superlative happiness in the 21st century. Unless it does so, Japan cannot be called a democracy. Nor could we expect its prosperity to continue. I say this because those who discriminate against others will assuredly reap the ill rewards of their own injustice.

I first saw this missile site on the property of our training center in Okinawa in March, 1983. The site was by then an abandoned relic that local residents wanted to see demolished. And while I could well understand their feelings, I was opposed. “No. Let's preserve these remnants forever. Let's leave them as evidence that humanity once engaged in something so foolish as war!

“Here in Okinawa, because it is a focal point for those concerned with world peace, there already exists the ‘Lily Monument’ and the ‘Monument to the Brave.’ In a different

Title: Okinawa's 'Monument to World Peace'

Subject: World Tribune 12/24/99 n.3274 p.12 WT991224p12

Author: Daisaku Ikeda

Keywords: Daisaku Essays Ikeda Monument Okinawa Peace Photo President Tribune World

sense, why don't we turn this missile site into a foundation for our thoughts and reflections on peace, not only for Japan, but for the whole world?"

In this way, the "Monument to World Peace" was born. These destructive caverns of death have been turned into a fortress for a paean to life, where even our friends from China can gather. Adorning the monument are statues of youth making a vow for peace.

Nuclear weapons and war both arise from the human mind. But we must change the "target" of the human will. We must work to achieve a great turnaround in this realm!

The monument symbolizes our calling to that task. All the tragedies of human history are crystallized on this island. Therefore, that tragic history must begin its transformation from Okinawa.

One day in the future, a young boy of Okinawa will ask, "Father, what is a nuclear bomb? Was there once such a thing?"

To which his father will reply, "Yes son. Long, long ago, human beings did some very strange things. They hated one another, and built many machines that could kill, aiming them at each other. And this they called 'security.'"

And some day a young girl of Okinawa will ask, "Mother, what is war? Was there such a thing in the past?"

To which her mother will answer, "Yes, my dear. Long, long ago, human beings did some very peculiar things. They killed and injured one another, and they caused much blood and many tears to flow. And this, they said, was 'for the sake of peace.'"

Today let us build a foundation of joy for the sake of this brilliant tomorrow.

Eight in a series