

Here in Okinawa, in the last World War, the civilian population was dragged into one of the most intense ground wars in history.

The typhoon of steel claimed more than 200,000 precious lives and destroyed invaluable cultural heritages and verdant natural environment.

June 23rd marks the 77th anniversary of the war.

Each and every person of Okinawa, who has experienced firsthand the absurdity and cruelty of war, has stood up against the postwar ruins and confusion with ceaseless efforts and unwavering faith, and together, hand in hand, we have overcome many difficulties.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of Okinawa's reversion to mainland Japan.

In 1971, the year before the reversion, the government of the Ryukyu Islands submitted the "Proposal of Steps for the Reversion of Okinawa" to the Japanese government and the National Diet of Japan. This Proposal clearly stated its strong desire for Okinawa to be returned to Japan as "peaceful islands without military bases".

However, Okinawa still accounts for only about 0.6% of Japan's total land area, and yet it is home to about 70.3% of all U.S. military facilities in Japan. The residents of Okinawa continue to bear an excessive base burden from incidents and accidents deriving from U.S. military bases, aircraft noise, water and soil pollution, and other environmental problems.

For this reason, Okinawa Prefecture will strongly demand a solution that will work quickly to the base problem in Okinawa. Solutions that will be sought include requests for different arrangements and the downsizing of U.S. military bases in Okinawa, a fundamental review of the Status of Forces Agreement, reduction of the base burden in regards to incidents and accidents, removal of dangers as soon as possible including the immediate suspension of operations at Futenma Air Station, and abandoning the construction of a new base in Henoko.

It is our responsibility to pass on our precious natural environment and our unique Okinawan culture to our children and grandchildren, who will be responsible for the future, in order to develop a peaceful and truly prosperous Okinawa.

Throughout the world, regional conflicts continue unabated, and there are grave problems such as refugee crises, poverty, hunger, discrimination, and the violation of human dignity.

In Ukraine, Russian aggression continues to claim innocent lives. The successive destruction of beautiful cityscapes and nature, the loss of peaceful daily life as it was taken away, and being forced to live side by side with fear evoke memories of the ground war involving Okinawa residents 77 years ago, and are such a shock that is beyond description.

The people of Okinawa sincerely hope that the solidarity and cooperation of the international community will bring about a ceasefire as soon as possible.

Okinawa Prefecture has been providing support, from the standpoint of humanitarian assistance, such as the acceptance of refugees from Ukraine, and we strongly hope for the earliest possible restoration of peace.

The preamble of the UNESCO Charter states, "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed".

In order to create a peaceful society, I believe that the international community has been called upon to work together in solidarity in order to recognize diversity and differences in values and to pursue peace, not through confrontation and division, but through mutual respect and dialogue.

Okinawa has a history of maintaining peace, through exchange with many countries, with tolerance and the spirit of Bankoku Shinryo which was fostered through its unique history and culture.

Okinawa Prefecture, with such an accumulated history, erected the "Cornerstone of Peace" inscribed with the names of all those who lost their lives in the Battle of Okinawa, regardless of nationality or whether they are military or civilian, with the hope of lasting peace throughout the world.

This year, additional inscriptions have been added, with 241,686 people having been inscribed, and this effort continues to this day.

In the current turbulent world situation, we believe that now it is important to convey to the world, while crossing national borders, the "Okinawan spirit/*chimugukuru*" of cherishing peace and the preciousness of life that is embodied in the Cornerstone of Peace.

77 years have passed since the end of the war and the memories of the tragic Battle of Okinawa are fading. With the reality of war unknown to the majority of the current generation, it is our important mission to correctly convey the reality of the Battle of Okinawa and its teachings to the next generation in order to keep the memories of the abominable war from fading away.

Okinawa Prefecture has created a "New Proposal of Steps Toward the Realization of a Peaceful and Prosperous Okinawa" to continue carrying out the wishes of the people of Okinawa at the time of the reversion to Japan. In addition, in order to resolve issues that still remain 50 years after the reversion, and to realize the ideal vision for Okinawa as envisioned in the Okinawa 21st Century Vision as the people of Okinawa desire.

We will do our utmost to realize "a compassionate society where no one is left behind" while making the most of the various characteristics of Okinawa Prefecture in accordance with the "New Okinawa 21st Century Vision Basic Plan" that began in FY2022. Additionally, while

working towards the future of a "peaceful and prosperous '*churashima*' Okinawa" that the people of Okinawa desire.

We will continue our unceasing efforts for the abolition of nuclear weapons, the renunciation of war, and the establishment of lasting peace, so that the voice of peace can be heard from Okinawa anywhere in the world and Okinawa will never again be turned into a battlefield.

Today, on Memorial Day, I offer my heartfelt condolences to the souls of all the victims, regardless of nationality, and declare my determination to continue to convey the value of peace to the next generation, to contribute to the realization of international peace, and to work with all my strength to realize a peaceful and prosperous Okinawa where all citizens can truly experience happiness.