

Okinawa Governor Orders Halt to U.S. Military Base Project



Tokyo, March 24 (RHC)-- The governor of Japan's Okinawa Island has ordered the suspension of the project to build a new U.S. military base amid the persisting row over the major American military presence in the island. The order by Governor Takeshi Onaga was announced on Monday, demanding that the Japanese government halt all construction activities at the site.

He made the decision after local authorities discovered that concrete blocks used in underwater drilling surveys had damaged coral reefs in the region. Speaking at a press conference, Onaga gave the Japanese Defense Bureau, which oversees the project, one week to stop all work on the military structure, and threatened to revoke the bureau's license for ongoing drilling work if it failed to abide by the order.

It was not immediately clear, however, if Japan's defense ministry would actually comply with the suspension order as Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga stated in a press briefing that Tokyo was reviewing the order, but that the project should continue anyway.

Moreover, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has persistently expressed his support for the project as his government considers it a key component to Japan's military alliance with the United States.

Onaga vowed during his election campaign last year to block the construction of the base. He was elected last November, defeating the incumbent governor who had approved the plan in exchange for “a hefty cash injection to the local economy,” a move that many residents of the island considered as a betrayal, leading to his electoral defeat.

The new base is aimed at replacing the U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, which is located in a swarming urban area. The relocation site, known as Henoko, sits off the island’s isolated northeastern coast with an estimated construction cost of at least \$8.6 billion.

Meanwhile, many Okinawa residents want Futenma entirely moved off the island, with opponents further arguing that the military project would endanger the coral reef, tropical fish and other marine life.

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