

Words on Receiving the Okinawa Peace Prize

Nakamura Tetsu

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By Nakamura Tetsu

Translated by Kyoko Selden

NAKAMURA Tetsu, a Japanese physician, has worked in Afghanistan and Pakistan for nineteen years as head of the Peshawar Medical Association, an NGO that he founded and heads. PMA initially provided medical care. Activities center on the main hospital in Peshawar, a Pakistan frontier city on the Afghan border, as well as three clinics in Afghanistan and two in Northern Pakistan. The staff of 160, including five Japanese, treat 180,000 patients per year. In July 2000 it added a second activity, drilling wells to provide water for drought-stricken villagers.

In addition to the speech given below, Dr. Nakamura is the author of a book, A Doctor Drilling Wells, describing the yearlong fight to resist the drought that devastated Afghanistan in 2000-2001.

Dr. Nakamura was the recipient of the first Okinawa Peace Prize.

On this occasion, I would like first to express my gratitude for an undeserved award. It is not easy to pursue peace in the midst of the chaos of war. The recent Japanese trend is painted in one hue, that being the belief that war against terrorism cannot be averted. Many have raised doubts about the Peshawar Society, whose work is in water resource maintenance and medicine in Afghanistan.

Our long-term activities in Afghanistan have indeed

received support that can be called anomalous from people of conscience in Japan. Still, I must say that I feel uneasy if asked whether the nation as a whole has been able to maintain its prayer for a peaceful Japan, or its pride as an independent peace-loving nation. In these circumstances, I find it particularly meaningful that the Okinawan people have recognized our activities as a "contribution toward peace through non-violence."

While we work in far off Afghanistan, here in Okinawa, U.S. planes fly off to attack. The contrast between our work in Afghanistan and that of U.S. forces here is overwhelming to those of us who strive for peace. That people on "Okinawa, the island of bases," speak on behalf of those who have been deprived of the chance to raise their voices on behalf of peace, is a source of honor for us Japanese in Afghanistan.

In Afghanistan and Pakistan, where we work, the real situation is that people are forced to choose between cooperation with the United States or starvation and the perishing of the country. Thousands have died under air attack, and tens of thousands more starved to death as a result of the bombing.

The contradictions found in Okinawa are Japan's contradictions in concentrated form. The situation in which one cannot survive unless one cooperates with the U.S. military is identical with that in Afghanistan. I would like to convey this to you: the agony of Okinawa in the embrace of U.S. bases is, in miniature, the situation of the entire Asian world.

The peace prize at this time in a way shoots an arrow toward a world which seems to be losing human pride. We know that there are debates about the validity of peace prizes. However, we are convinced that peace is something that all Okinawans sincerely aspire to, regardless of political differences.

It was only half a century ago that "Peaceful Japan" was extolled with great acclaim, something that was made possible only by the sacrifice of millions and tens of millions of Asian comrades. Now, however, that lesson, which makes one tremble, is fading. No sense of nationality or national boundaries can override the importance of human lives. It is certainly difficult for us to come up right now with instant solutions. Nevertheless, we can continue to convey our aspiration for peace to the next generation and hope

that a current will eventually grow.

The money presented to us with the peace prize will be used for the clinic being constructed in Eastern Afghanistan at Dara-E Pech. We will name it the "Okinawa Peace Clinic." By doing so, we hope against hope to construct the foundation of peace in the land of chaos and war.

It is an iron rule of human history that those who live by violence will die by violence. We pray that the peace prize awarded us will, transcending all political differences, have power to advance toward the future.

Finally, I would like to thank all concerned who made efforts on behalf of this prize.

August 30, 2002

NAKAMURA Tetsu, Local Representative of the Peshawar Association

For Medoruma Shun's commentary on the "ingenious timing" of the 2002 Okinawa Peace Prize, [see](#) "The Okinawa Peace Prize Fraud."