

Statement in support of Mayor Kang

We are shocked at the devious and heavy-handed methods being used to violate the will of the people of Gangjeong Village, Jeju, South Korea. And we have great admiration for their Mayor, Kang Dong-Kyun, who, for four years, has been doing everything he in his power to ensure that the will of the villagers is respected.

In contradiction of the island's official motto: "Island of Peace"; the South Korean navy has been trying to build a base on Jeju Island for many years; already two villages, Hawsoon(2002) and Weemee(2005), had rejected hosting the base. In Gangjeong, a corrupt mayor was willing to deliver his village to the navy in 2007. On very short notice, he called a village meeting at which he pushed through a decision to 'welcome' the base. In a village with an electorate of just over 1000 people, less than 100 participated in this momentous 'decision'. As soon as the villagers as a whole learned of this maneuver, they ousted the old mayor by a vote of 417 to 15 and then decided to make the ad hoc civil society campaign against the base an official activity of the village. On that basis, they overwhelmingly elected Mayor Kang, who has lead the struggle ever since. On August 20, 2007, the village, in a democratically conducted a vote, opposed the base's construction, 725 to 77 ((IS 77 correct?)).

Villagers were told in June 2007 by Kim Sung-Chan, Director of War Power (currently Chief of Naval Operations), that the navy would not expropriate villagers' lands. Despite purchases from absentee landowners, resort owners, and a few villagers, the government was not able to achieve even fifty-percent ownership. More than half of the land in Gangjeong is owned by local people who refused to sell it to the Government. In 200X ((need the year the expropriation began)), the government began expropriating land anyway. Residences were told if they did not collect their 'compensation' within two months from the time of expropriation, they would not only lose their lands but also but be charged overdue fees on their 'transfer income tax'.

When in 200X ((need the year)) construction began on the base despite all of these irregularities, villagers felt that they had to intervene before their farm lands and fishing waters were destroyed. Using strictly non-violent means, they have successfully impeded progress. But the Government continues to escalate its pressure on the villagers, arresting and imprisoning its anti-base leadership, including Mayor Kang.

Jeju is a UNESCO triple-crowned site, as a Biosphere Reserve (2002), World Natural Heritage (2007), and Global Geopark (2010). Throughout Jeju, the area around Gangjeong is renowned for having the finest water quality both on the land and in the sea. Ongoing archeological excavations reveal that this naturally rich area attracted human inhabitants already in the Bronze Age. We cannot be indifferent to this unnatural and illegal assault on Gangjeong and Jeju.

Mayors for Peace members are opposed to nuclear weapons and the extraordinary threat they represent to humanity. There are currently no agreements barring the entry of nuclear-armed submarines into South Korean Naval Bases; such visits used to be commonplace and could resume at any time. Under these circumstances, we support the demand of Mayor Kang and the citizens of Gangjeong that the South Korean Government should hold a supervised vote of the villagers on construction of the base and pledge to respect its outcome.

Signed:

City/: