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Looking The System In The Face: A Women's Regional Network Against Militarization

In my fieldwork for this research on 'women opposing violence, militarism and war' I've met a lot of women's organizations that address the threat of impending war, instances of war fighting, and the damage a war leaves behind. Here at a meeting in Manila in the Philippines I met for the first time a group whose focus is *the military system itself*, the structures of preparedness and control that deform everyday life in many countries. In particular the group addresses the practices of the world's dominant superpower, the USA, in imposing militarization on client countries in its own interests, shaping the policies of their governments, and tying them into contracts for purchase of US weaponry and training.

The **East Asia - US - Puerto Rico Women's Network against Militarism**, known to its members as simply 'the Network', was formed in 1997 when 40 women activists, policymakers, teachers and students from the US, Japan and Okinawa, South Korea and the Philippines gathered in Okinawa to strategize together about the negative effects of US military operations in those countries. Puerto Rican women later joined the Network.¹

The Network is not of itself an organization, rather a collaboration among 15 or more women's organizations and individuals active in their own communities. I originally met and interviewed two of the US-based activists, Margo Okazawa-Rey and Gwyn Kirk, in San Francisco. I learned that their forthcoming international meeting was to be held some months later in the Philippines, and the host group in Manila generously agreed to my presence there as an observer/researcher.

So I had the privilege of joining them in Manila for the 5th international meeting of the Network which took place on November 22-28th 2004. Through listening to the discussions, joining the group on a visit to local projects and in conversation

¹ The Appendix lists groups affiliated with the Network today. In principle, the Network could become worldwide in scope, but at present they are intent on integrating new members as resources and connections allow. As it is, divergences in experience, culture and language make working together effectively quite a challenge. The Network have been gradually expanding, and shifting from a shift from a focus on the US military presence abroad to militarism and militarisation as such.

with participants I obtained a good sense of what preoccupies these women in their home countries, and how they are organized to resist militarism -- especially its imposition under US foreign and defence policy.

The Network's mission and philosophy

The Network's mission is

to promote, model, and protect genuine security by creating an international women's network of solidarity against militarism. To strengthen our common consciousness and voice by sharing our experiences and making critical connections among militarism, imperialism, and systems of oppression and exploitation based on gender, race, class and nation (Network leaflet 2004).

The Network's public statements define military security as an oxymoron, linked as it is to a culture of violence. They call for the 'de-militarization of cultures and national identities'. They are specific about women: they aim to 'promote solidarity and a healing process among the diversity of women who are impacted by militarism and violence' (Network leaflet 2002). They are equally specific about gender.

Masculinity in many countries, including the United States, is defined in military terms. We need a redefinition of masculinity, strength, power, and adventure; an end to war toys and the glorification of war and warriors (Network leaflet 2002).

In a video I heard Aida Santos, the Network country contact for the Philippines, say 'the basis of militarism is the strengthening of the patriarchal system'. And in everything Network participants do they mark an intersection of gender with race and class, showing how poor women of colour are worst affected by the many aspects of militarism, including military service, 'paying double every time'.

The Network pitch their efforts towards ending the projection of US force overseas, representing it as a 'push for expanding US global economic and military influence' that involves supporting undemocratic regimes in host nations, and coercing them into policies that deform local societies, harm women in particular ways, and destroy the environment (final statement, Network 4th international meeting, Seoul, 2002).

Network participants are well informed about the various bilateral agreements under which US bases are sited in 'host countries', and about the legislation, local and international, to which the US should be bound. Network participants support the actions of the affiliated groups in demanding the withdrawal of US bases, cleanup of the social, economic and physical effects of the US bases.

They monitor the effects on local states of their military agreements with the USA, and call for an end to the weapons trade.

The work of the Network has relevance within US society, as well as in countries affected by US militarization. When I interviewed her in May 2004, Margo said that *militarism* has been little understood or talked about in the USA till now.

War is understood, yes, but that our society was organized conceptually around military values, that isn't generally understood. Nor is the concept of nation. Because we are Number One we don't see it. Our work has been aimed at surfacing these things. In fact, 9/11 has helped us do that.

The organizing process

The Network participants can afford to meet physically only once every two years at most, though different subsets may meet more regularly. When they do hold an international meeting, one aspect of business is inevitably how to carry on their activity effectively in the interim. This time they discussed: communication, responsibility and accountability, participation and resources. Geographically, the groups are very distant from each other and culturally very distinct, with a variety of political ideas and styles of work. Between them they speak many languages, so interpretation is a continual challenge and early in the Network's life they made a collective commitment to dealing with it creatively. Their position is clear: it is not only 'those who don't speak English' who need interpreters, 'we *all* need interpretation.' On some occasions they have had a simultaneous interpretation system at their meetings. At our Manila meeting however they lacked this facility. Despite the presence of several dedicated and capable interpreters, I could see exceptionally patient and intelligent listening were necessary.

Between meetings they keep each other current on developments in their region and also work together on fundraising. The Network are not yet very developed in their use of the Internet, not for lack of technical expertise but for lack of funding and the complexity of working in five languages (Japanese, Korea, Tagalog, English and Spanish). English is their common language, but they want to avoid English-language dominance as much as possible. Three of the groups are developing web sites, and one of these may eventually become the Network site. They stay in touch through a system of country representatives, linked by e-mail – 'copying to' a simple list of individual addresses, rather than using the group address of a listserv. They are actively developing a code of conduct for their interactions - for instance acknowledging that some groups need longer to react to messages than others. If they can raise the funding, they may organize interim meetings of the country representatives. In South Korea and the Philippines, the countries in which the participating groups are most numerous, women have set up umbrella organizations (SAFE Korea and Philippines Working Group – PWG) to serve as regional coordinations for the Network.

The Network choose to call their biennial get-togethers 'meetings', not 'conferences', because they are committed to actual work: sharing information, developing strategy, and always 'striving for a better style of working together'. Each country group presented a written country report to the meeting in Manila, highlighting developments that concerned them and how their organizations were responding. They identified major themes for the meeting and broke into thematic working groups, with, where possible, at least one representative from every region present in each group. At the end of the meeting, they produced a statement of demands for publication. The remainder of this research profile is assembled and summarised from all the above kinds of documentation generated by the meeting.

Consolidating friendships and renewing connections is an important aspect of these meetings too. They take care with the quality of facilitation and interaction, make space for festivity and celebration, and, as I've found feminists doing so many countries, they use ritual and symbolism inventively. Puerto Rican women made a beautiful quilt of many colours and images, several metres square, which they brought to the Manila meeting. At the meeting in November the Korean women led a ceremony with traditional paper costumes, bells and candles. Terri Keko'olani, an indigenous Hawaiian woman, opened sessions with a prayer for ancestors to join us in the meeting.

1. The Philippines

To assist participation in the Network, the Filipina women had organized a coalition of nine organizations under the title Philippines Working Group (PWG). This grouping had had practical importance in mounting the 5th international meeting in Manila. But, as Aida Santos, the country contact for the Philippines told me in interview, it also has ongoing importance locally.

There have been mixed organizations of men and women in the Philippines concerned with militarism, because people generally are affected by the government's subservience in its foreign and domestic policy to the agenda of US government. But militarization is something that affects women in particular ways. There've been a few occasional women's initiatives here. But we see our involvement in the PWG and the Network as an opportunity to consolidate our efforts specifically as women. A complementary aspect of our agenda will be human rights, because that's been an organizing principle of the women's movement here, beginning with the effects of martial law under the dictatorship.

US policy and the Philippines

In the late 1890s, after 300 years of Spanish rule, the Philippines became an official colony of the USA, only obtaining independence in 1946. Even after independence, the Philippines continued to host US military bases. The Clark Air

Force Base near Angeles City, and the Subic Naval Base near Olongapo were two of the largest US bases in the world. In 1991, due partly to the overthrow of President Marcos, a close ally of the US, and partly to the effects of a volcanic eruption near to Clark Air Force Base, these two bases were closed.

However, in 1999 a new agreement, the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) was signed by the US and Philippine governments. This allows for more free-ranging access to the islands by US aircraft, ships and personnel. The VFA gives the US total jurisdiction over crimes committed by US personnel and the Philippines may not claim for damage to the environment.

The women of the Philippine Working Group were hardly surprised by the new developments. In their report to the meeting they stressed the US economic interest in Southeast Asia. With 525 million people, the region is America's 5th largest trading partner. India, with one billion people, and above all China, with 1.3 billion, are now seen as vital markets for US capital and commodities. The South China Sea has estimated oil reserves of 7.5 billion barrels. The Philippines is bound to continue to be a pawn in the US game of world hegemony.

Mindanao and the 'war on terror'

The US response to 9/11 has had a particular impact in the island of Mindanao. Ada Estrepa, Fatima Pir Allian and other Mindanao participants at our meeting reported on the situation there.

The island is home to a fiercely independent population of Moros, a Muslim people whose religious identity results from trade with Arabia as early as the 12th century. The territory is exceptionally valuable to both the Philippine state and international big business, having resources of timber, natural gas, aluminium and other ores, and being suitable for the production of rubber, sugar, cattle and other exportable goods. Mindanao has been subject for the last half-century to a settlement policy that has reduced the original inhabitants to a minority and turned them into landless tenants. Today there is a particular concern that international mining companies have government encouragement to extract minerals with potentially devastating impact on the ancestral lands of indigenous peoples, as well as damage to the wider environment.

In the late 1960s, Christian terror squads used by right-wing business and political interests provoked insurgency by a Moro National Liberation Front, which was in turn brutally counter-attacked by state forces. Between 1970 and 1996 more than 100,000 people were killed and an estimated 2 million displaced. After a pause in the conflict under the presidency of Cory Aquino, the fighting was resumed. During 2000 President Estrada waged an 'all-out war' on the Moro insurgents at a cost of 6 billion pesos. (All the equipment was bought from the USA.)

Since 2001, the US government has drawn the government of the Philippines into its 'war on terror', claiming, on scant evidence, that the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), whose militancy now surpasses that of the left-wing MLNF, are linked with Al Qaeda and the Jemaah Islamiyah, thus justifying high military expenditure and arms imports on the part of the Philippine government, and the further entrenchment of the US military.

President Arroyo angered antimilitarists by complying with US pressure to join the coalition invading Iraq, thereby exposing hundreds of thousands of Filipino and Filipina migrant workers in the Middle East to the risk of reprisals. When a Filipino man was indeed taken hostage by anti-US insurgents in Iraq, popular protest caused Arroyo to recall her troops. She had recently been re-elected in a vote that some suspected of fraud, and feared her legitimacy would be further damaged by the execution of the hostage publicly on the Internet.

Military prostitution, violence and poverty

The military may have left Clark and Subic, but their effects are still felt locally and will continue to be felt for years to come. The three main results of half a century of military occupation around the cities of Angeles and Olongapo are (1) a sex industry, (2) a population of Amerasian children from US/Filipina liaisons now growing to adulthood and feeling discrimination and disadvantage, and (3) contamination by toxic materials that is producing clusters of cases of leukaemia and other illnesses in communities near the former bases.

The Philippines host group took us on field trips to the cities adjacent to the former bases to visit local groups addressing these problems. I will focus here on the theme of prostitution, the theme about which I learned most because I accompanied the visit to Angeles City, where we were received by Nagka, United Women of Angeles, who are survivors of military prostitution organizing in support of present-day prostitutes.

Filipina women's organizations have long waged a struggle against violence against women, and they've won some valuable legislation penalizing violence against women and their children, rape, and trafficking. But violence against women is still endemic, and prostitution and trafficking (which the women of the Philippines Working Group see as a form of violence and a human rights issue) have not declined with the closing of the Clark and Subic bases. On the contrary, there are reports of rising incidence of prostitution and trafficking of women, and increasingly of very young women. This trend is the more dangerous in a society where reproductive rights are undermined by the Catholic Church and the government.

According to BUKLOD and NAGKA, member organizations of the PWG, there are 1,500 women and girls in prostitution in Olongapo and neighbourhoods

around the former Subic base, and as many as 6,000 in Angeles City, adjacent to the former Clark base. Today the sex workers serve not only visiting and local military personnel but increasingly sex tourism. PWG quote an International Labour Organization estimate of half a million women in prostitution in the Philippines as a whole. Other estimates suggest 100,000 children, aged 15 and below, may be involved in this trade.

The Visiting Forces Agreement allows US military use of 22 ports as needed for repairs, fuelling and R&R. Prostitution is expected to spread widely and continue to grow. The form it takes is changing overtime. Increasingly the business is arranged by Internet. The servicemen choose a woman from a web site and she is delivered by van to barracks or ship.

Nagka: 'Linda's diner'

Linda Lampera, the founder and president of Nagka, accompanied some of us on a day trip to visit their small restaurant and office in Angeles City. The women welcomed us to lunch and told us about the organization. The activists themselves are survivors of military prostitution, and now they lend support to present-day prostitutes, especially in cases where they have experienced violence or other abuses. The diner is situated in a row of brick-built market stalls in the heart of the bar area. In the neighbourhood we saw many white male bar owners and sex tourists, sitting at tables outside their bars with Filipina entertainers and prostitutes. Some of the bar owners are former US military men, who have registered the business in the name of a Filipina wife. Nagka is inevitably unpopular with the bar owners, who have exerted pressure on the local municipal council to close down the project.²

Prostitution at home, unemployment and outward migration are linked. In 2004 the Asian Development Bank estimated that 12 million Filipinos are trapped in extreme poverty. The unemployment rate is 13.7 percent, and almost one-third of the labour force is unemployed or underemployed. Eight million Filipinos, more than half of them women, have migrated to work abroad. Almost half are undocumented, their status as migrant workers illegal. Every day a further 2,500 leave the country to join them. Many Filipina women are involuntarily trafficked overseas. And women migrant workers abroad in general frequently experience violence and sexual abuse.

Ironically, many Filipina women work in the health services of western countries, while lack of adequate health care is a serious problem at home. The Philippines labours under a huge national debt, and its servicing requires yet more borrowing. Under pressure to impose a neo-liberal economic regime, the

² It seems the vested interests are winning. After my return to England I received an e-mail with photos showing the demolition of Nagka's cafe and office, as well as other women's food stalls, by the council's bulldozers. They were calling for help funding a legal appeal.

government keep a tight rein on public spending to the detriment of services such as healthcare.

The Philippines country report stressed *the continuum of violence against women*, which occurs not only in full-scale armed conflict or in post-conflict situations, but as an everyday reality in the militarist regimes of supposed 'peacetime'. It concludes

Militarization is the process where our society becomes increasingly dominated by military values, institutions and patterns of behaviour... and militarism has become a way of life, destroying the environment and communities and leaving us without a future for the next generation. All this must stop, and stop now. The role of the superpower United States and all its allies in promoting the global militaristic culture should be critically examined and resisted.

2. South Korea

SAFE Korea draws together women of five organizations (see Appendix) three of which are women-only, while two include men and women. In interview with South Korean participants I was told

In Korea, the peace movement has been simply regarded as a reunification movement and its main focus is in relation to the 'big' issues – economic, military and political – to the neglect of the actual lives of people and the experience of women. We want to work differently from this mainstream, and go beyond its narrow nationalism. We want to focus more on the impact of militarization on *daily life*. The victims are often marginalized people, often poor. We want to emphasize the human rights of the *individual*, the value of each life.

Besides, they said, Korean women are also a disadvantaged group, and the impact of militarization on women is neglected by the mainstream. The SAFE women want to bring to it a women's voice and a feminist analysis. Additionally, they see SAFE Korea as a way of strengthening the women's peace movement in South Korea by feeding back into the five participating organizations what they learn from women of other countries through the Network. The country report from SAFE Korea to the 5th international meeting raised six themes.

Opposing the South Korean government's support for the US-led invasion of Iraq

Their analysis of the incidents of September 11, 2001, is that these were 'an inevitable result of US hegemony'. Power that is based on military dominance cannot bring about peace, and 9/11 should lead the US to reflect on the effects of its pursuit of economic self-interest.

To join effectively, as women, in a mass movement against the sending of South Korean troops to Iraq, the Women's Peace Association had assembled a coalition of 40 women's organizations under the title Korea Women's Peace Action. They held demonstrations, meetings and rallies aiming to shift the South Korean government away from support for Bush's 'war on terror'. However, the economic relation with the USA since the Second World War has made South Korea relatively wealthy. Many Koreans fear that if South Korea does not comply with US wishes the country will pay a price in loss of foreign investment. It was no doubt with this in mind that the South Korean government sent a contingent to Iraq, the biggest force after those of the US, UK and Australia.

Supporting the movement for conscientious objection

South Korea has two years' compulsory military conscription for men, without the possibility of an alternative service for conscientious objectors. As of October 2004 there were 677 conscientious objectors in prison, all men. They suffer heavy surveillance while in prison, and after release are ineligible for government employment.

This relatively high incidence of conscientious objection is almost all due to the presence in South Korea of 10,000 members of the Jehovah's Witnesses, a sect for whom refusing to fight is a religious duty. There have been almost no secular refusers, because South Korea's anti-Communist ideology and national-security law have been used ever since World War II to suppress any divergent opinion. However, a few secular conscientious objectors had stepped forward and their numbers increased with the Iraq war, with the result that in 2002 a support organization, Korea Solidarity for Conscientious Objection, was set up.

The women's organizations gathered in SAFE Korea call on the government to recognise conscientious objectors. For one reason, they see militarism in South Korean society as having a deep connection with the oppression of women. The conscientious objectors are often stigmatised as 'women and gays'. Again, 'Korean women are the victims of militarism and yet women are excluded from discussions relating to the military.' In 2002 a women's college with a web site on conscientious objection had been verbally harassed on the Internet.

Work with women in military prostitution

Sexual exploitation is one significant effect on women of the presence of US military bases in South Korea, as elsewhere. Women in military prostitution work mainly from clubs in 'camp towns' (*kijichon*) near to US military establishments. Overall, the numbers of clubs and of women in the trade had increased since the previous year. Due to changes in entry regulations for 'entertainers', there had been a decline in the number of Russian women working in the bars, and an increase in Philippine and Korean women. Women in military prostitution face problems of surveillance, of violence, confinement and illegality in their work

status. Often their passports are confiscated and they are forced into prostitution.

A leading organization supporting the rights of women entertainers and women in prostitution in the 'camptowns' is Durebang (My Sister's Place), a key member of SAFE Korea and long-term participant in the Network. They offer various support and professional counseling to women by hiring counselors who speak Tagalog, Russian and English. Women also come to them for help with problems related to childcare, marriage, and divorce from US soldiers. In the course of their work Durebang co-operate with migrant workers' groups and women's shelters. They also need to work closely with police and immigration departments.

Women organizing for women's rights have achieved the passing of some progressive legislation in South Korea, including a new law of September 2004, remarkable for protecting the rights of prostituted women and punishing patrons and pimps. Since its introduction monitoring and raids, they say, have been much more effective. Customers have been scared off: 'clients, whether they are locals or foreigners, can get a \$3,000 fine or one year in prison'. There's an option of community service for offenders, and the women's organizations are offering to organize this. However, while the new law had improved the situation of Korean prostitutes it had not helped foreign women, who, if they wished to escape from their situation, were still offered no alternative but to return to their countries.

Durebang and other women's organizations welcome the new law, but are calling for it to be strengthened and effectively implemented. Meanwhile, as in the Philippines, the business interests are fighting back. 'Owners and sex-trade businesses have organized prostituted women to hold hunger strikes, rallies, and successfully manipulated media to show that prostituted women oppose the new law. The women's groups that are involved in eradication of prostitution continue to face threats and vandalism.'

Amerasians

As in the Philippines, in the half-century of US military presence many Asian women working in the camp towns of South Korea have given birth to children fathered by US soldiers. Under South Korean government policy, around 10,000 Amerasian children had been sent to the USA for adoption. The few hundred remaining had had to endure severe discrimination in an ethnocentric and racist society, so that many had developed psychological problems. Many were living in economic hardship. Durebang is in the process of making a documentary film to help open up public discussion about the rights and needs of Amerasians in South Korea.

Addressing crimes committed by US troops

The South Korean report noted some improvements in the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) that governs the presence of the US military in South Korea. In a notorious incident in 2002 two middle school girls had been crushed to death by a US armoured vehicle. The incident had been underplayed by both governments, despite a nationwide candle-light protest against the SOFA.

However in two recent incidents, one involving death and injury in a car accident caused by the drunk US military driver, and the other a death from stabbing, also by US soldier, the perpetrators of the crimes had been tried and sentenced to prison. This improvement had been won partly by civil society action: families of victims were now involving themselves in seeking justice.

Opposing the expansion of US military bases

The knowledge that North Korea possesses nuclear capability is a source of great tension in South Korean society. Since the democracy movement succeeded in changing the regime in the South, progress has been made on the diplomatic front towards a peace agreement. This has been imperilled since 9/11 by US threats against North Korea as part of the so-called 'axis of evil'. SAFE Korea opposes US statements that heighten tension between North and South Korea, and call for the abolition of the National Security Law, which sustains the division of the peninsula, increases the threat of nuclear war, and prevents progress towards democracy.

A Pentagon planning document, Joint Vision 2020, 'concluded that Asia will replace Europe as the key focus of US military strategy in the early 21st century and pointed to China as a potential anniversary' (cited by Kirk et al, 1999).³ In April 2003 following a summit meeting known as FOTA (the Future of the Republic of Korea-US Alliance Policy Initiative), the two governments had announced significant changes. There would be a reduction of 12,500 US troops in South Korea by 2008. Ten military administrative functions would be transferred to the South Korean military, which was urged to increase its capacity. Nonetheless, the US would be spending \$110 million to strengthen US forces in South Korea, and indeed, since the FOTA summit, new Patriot missiles, Long Bow Apache helicopters and Stealth planes had been put in place.

Secondly, the main concentration of US establishments would move from Yongsan, near the border with North Korea, to Pyongtaek in the southwest. The move was explained as putting key bases and facilities out of the firing range of North Korea's massive artillery. The women's report continues

³ Gwyn Kirk, Rachel Cornwell and Margo Okazawa-Rey, 'Women and the US Military in East Asia', *Foreign Policy in Focus*, Vol 4, No 9. March 1999 -- revised July 2000. Accessed at www.fpif.org/briefs, March 4, 2005.

However, the new location of bases in the central part of South Korea can also be analysed as a military positioning against China. The US may also be trying to provoke North Korea to develop more missiles, so that the US can eventually set up a missile defence system in South Korea.

The decisions taken at the FOTA summit had given rise to concerned civil society movements on the issue of local people's land rights in both the territory the US military plans to abandon and the territory it plans to acquire. There had been angry demonstrations against 'military bases on land that sustains life'.

Statements made in Washington also suggest that the FOTA changes are designed to achieve flexibility in deploying US troops throughout the region. The women's organizations believe South Korea is being made a practice ground for the US military. The agreement further draws South Korea into support for US hegemonic wars, potentially entangling the country in armed conflict if its people don't wish to be part of.

3. Okinawa / Japan

It was impossible for participants from Okinawa and Japan to come to the meeting in Manila, because they had been totally dedicated to a campaign to get Takazato Suzuyo, the co-coordinator of Okinawa Women Act Against Military Violence, a participating organization of the Network, elected as the (first woman) mayor of Naha City. We learned that her campaign had not been successful, but 'she brought the issue of genuine security to the forefront of public debate'. Meanwhile from the country report for Okinawa submitted to the Network meeting, together with a subsequent letter from Takazato Suzuyo, we learned the following.

Stationed in Okinawa are 30,000 troops, in 39 bases and installations. This represents 75% of all US bases in Japan, despite the fact that Okinawa is only 0.6 percent of the country's land area (Kirk et al 1999). Women Act Against Military Violence reject all military expansion and call for international support in this critical campaign.

First, a major issue is the Japanese government's plan to build an off-shore heliport in Henoko in Nago City in northern Okinawa intended as a replacement for the Futenma Air Base, currently used by the U.S. Marines. Investigative boring work had been carried out during 2004. The majority of Nago citizens feel strongly about this development because it involves drilling in a marine area known for its coral reefs and an endangered sea mammal, the dugong. There had been tension in the area, and people had organized sit-ins, and protests using canoes and boats. During the terrible Battle of Okinawa in 1945, over 200,000 Okinawan people were killed – one third of the population. The forests and the ocean sustained those who survived. Yet, regardless of Okinawan

opposition, the Japanese government refuses to reconsider the plan to build the heliport, which will jeopardize possibilities for a sustainable way of life.⁴

Second, on 13 August 2004 a US military helicopter crashed into a building at Okinawa International University and burned it down. Miraculously, there were no deaths or injuries. But it caused fear and anger among people in Okinawa and led to a protest of 30,000 people.

Further, the US military are constructing an Urban Combat Training facility within Camp Hansen and local residents – including children and elderly women – have been protesting.

There is continuing violence against women. In November 2002 there had been rape attempt by a US military officer against a Filipina woman working in the Officers' Club on a US base. It was discovered that the officer in question had raped another woman in 1998. He continues to deny the charge and a long court process has ensued.

Despite the fact that the Okinawa prefectural government has been seeking revision of the highly unequal Status of Forces Agreement, the Japanese government does not respond to the request, instead giving priority to US-Japanese relations.

The US 'restructuring' of its bases in Asia is recognizably a disguise for the intention to redeploy against 'the new threat'. Okinawa Women Act Against Military Violence are afraid it will result in a stronger US military presence not only in Okinawa but also in Korea, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico.

Finally – the Iraq war. The women reported that U.S. warships and fighter jets stationed in Okinawa had been mobilized in the war against Iraq, and 3000 US Marines had been sent to Fallujah from Okinawa. As an eager supporter of George W. Bush, Japan's prime minister had pledged his commitment to the 'war on terror' and had deployed Japan's Ground Self-Defense Force in Iraq. The women wrote

We know what it means to live under military occupation. And we know about military violence against women. We do not support Japan's involvement in the war against Iraq. We are furious that our tax monies are used to kill innocent Iraqi people, especially women and children.

⁴ A posting on the Internet in February 2005, forwarded to us by Aida Santos of the Philippines Working Group, told how grandmothers and grandfathers of Henoko had sat in on government offices for ten days, occupied the beachfront for more than eight months and held a 20-day hunger strike. When the action moved offshore, some had learned to swim and row, taking to wetsuits to dive into the waters. So far they had succeeded in preventing all drilling of the seabed (www.progressiveportal.org/report.html).

4. Puerto Rico

Two women from Puerto Rico came to the meeting in Manila, both residents of the small island of Vieques, 36 miles long with a population of 9500. Carmen Valencia Perez and Zaida Torres Rodriguez were representing the Alianza de Mujeres Viequenses (Vieques Women's Alliance), formed in 1999, and the related Casa Alianza (Alliance House), a women's centre providing training and business skills.

Puerto Rico is effectively a colony of the USA -- termed a 'commonwealth'. They have a representative in the US Congress, who may speak but has no vote. Puerto Rico has its own constitution and a local senate, based on that of the USA. The colonisation of Puerto Rico, Cuba, Guam, American Samoa, Hawai'i and the Philippines by the USA occurred within three years around 1898, when the Spanish-American war brought about the end of the Spanish empire and the beginning of US imperialism. There is thus a strong historic logic in this co-operation today of women from Puerto Rico with those of East Asia.

The US Navy established a base on Vieques in 1940, attracted by its deep-water harbour, suitable for submarines. It was scaled down in 1980 and finally, following mass mobilization, lobbying in Washington and a referendum in Puerto Rico, the US Navy was completely withdrawn in 2003. For more than 60 years, although the islanders benefited from employment opportunities created by the military, they lived in a nightmare situation, clustered in the centre of the island with an arsenal one side of them and a bombing range the other.

The movement to get the Navy out began when a civilian guard was killed in a bombing accident. But there had long been awareness of the high-level of illness and reproductive problems due to poisoning by arsenic, mercury, lead and other heavy metals, contamination resulting from the dropping of 7 million lbs of explosives on this small island every year for 62 years.

Now the people of Vieques are calling for adequate compensation, control of their own land (which was transferred into the hands of the US Fisheries and Wildlife Department), clean-up of the environment, alternative employment and the improved services and care their damaged health requires. Their struggle is a two-handed one against the US government, but also against the Puerto Rican authorities that do not always reflect the interests of the people.

Women have been leaders in the movement from the start. The Alianza are informally linked to a larger women's peace movement in Puerto Rico, the Coordinadora Paz por la Mujer, which, like them, links the themes of militarization, employment, women's well-being and antiracism. I asked Carmen and Zaida why do you think it's important to organize as women? We do it, they said, in the spirit of householders: 'Vieques is our house. Women are head of the household. Women care for people and society.'

5. Hawai'i

At first I was surprised that Hawai'i had its own 'delegation', so to speak, at the Network meeting. Was it not one of the states of the USA? This was my naivete -- I quickly learned that the relationship between the Hawaiian indigenous people, the *Kanaka Maoli*, and the USA was not very different from that of Filipinos or Puerto Ricans, and that the occupation of these widely separated regions dates from the same imperialist moment of US history in the late 19th-century.

During the meeting, Terri Keko'olani-Raymond of DMZ-Hawai'i / *Aloha 'Aina*⁵ told how, in 1893, in complicity with American business interests in Hawai'i, the United States military participated in the overthrow of the sovereign Kingdom of Hawai'i in violation of international law and treaties. At the time local people organised a massive petition rejecting annexation, so to this day a lot of them consider their country to be under occupation. The United States military has established control over 6 percent of the total land area of Hawai'i, including 22 percent of the land on the island of O'ahu and even 68 percent of the little islet of Kaula.

Being home to the Pacific Command, Hawai'i is hugely important in the US projection of force worldwide. It is

the 'linchpin' of US military strategy in the Asia-Pacific region. Based in Honolulu, the Commander-in-chief of the Pacific Command (CINCPAC) governs... a 'transnational garrison state', encompassing 105 million square miles from the eastern coast of Africa to Mexico, 43 countries and over 60 percent of the world's population. The Pacific Command has 300,000 military personnel in the theater, including 100,000 forward deployed troops in the Western Pacific (Kajahiro 2003: 2)⁶.

Fifty-four percent of military land holdings in Hawai'i are the indigenous people's national lands, wrongfully appropriated by the US state. The *Kanaka Maoli*, for whom an important cultural value is *aloha 'aina*, or love for the land, have been engaged in unremitting struggle to get these culturally significant areas back from military use. Like the Puerto Rican and Filipina women, they call for the decontamination of hundreds of military sites where toxic materials and unexploded ordinance left from bombing and artillery testing endanger life and health.

The various stories told at this meeting, from Mindanao, Okinawa, Puerto Rico and now Hawai'i all made dramatically clear how the struggle for respect for inhabitants, land rights and justice in development are inseparable from the struggle for demilitarization and decolonisation. Take for instance the case of

⁵ DMZ stands for 'demilitarized zone' and Aloha 'Aina means 'Love for our Land'.

⁶ Kajahiro, Kyle "Aloha'Aina vs.Militarism", The Files, Vol.1, Issue 6, 2003. News Journal of the Native Hawaiian Multi-media Network.

one much-abused area, Makua Valley, on the island of O'ahu, where the US now wants to takeover more land.

Terri's press statement, issued at the Manila meeting, summarised the new threat:

Since September 11, 2001, Hawai'i has been undergoing the largest military expansion and 'land grab' since World War II. On the pretext of defending America against terrorist attacks, new militarization plans include the appropriation of a further 25,000 acres. This will violate state and county land use plans and threaten environmental degradation by toxic materials. Human health, endangered species and Hawaiian cultural sites will be destroyed or harmed. Further, increased militarization intensifies efforts to recruit our youth into the armed services.

The land is to be used by the Stryker Brigade and its 300 twenty-ton armored assault vehicles, designed for use against civilians in urban warfare situations such as Iraq today. The Army says it chose Hawai'i for the Stryker Brigade because 'its location within the Pacific Rim is a critical area of interest for the United States.' In other words, the Brigade trained in Hawai'i will be ready to be sent to places like the Philippines, Indonesia, South Korea, Okinawa and the Pacific island nations, for use against people who oppose US interests.

Makua has been chosen for the Stryker Brigade because its terrain is similar to that of Mindanao, in the Philippines, where the US have in mind to deploy this weapon. But Makua Valley harbours many endangered species of wildlife and is particularly rich in ancient *mo'olelo*, or historical stories, giving a great importance to the *Kanaka Maoli*. Makua means 'parents' in Hawai'ian language. It's believed to be the place where the Wakea (father sky) and Papa (mother earth) came together to create humans and all other life. There are many homeless people in Hawai'i, and in Makua some have set up communities on the beaches. Now the state is attempting to use the law to displace them (Kajahiro 2003).

The Hawaiian women told us that other developments planned by the US military in Hawai'i include the expansion of Missile Defense (Star Wars), involving missile launches over the north Pacific, new X-Band Radar installations, an expansion of the Air Force tracking system, the home-porting of a nuclear powered aircraft carrier in Pearl Harbor and the sale of land to private developers to finance new military housing.

They said the antimilitarist movement in Hawai'i is not only a movement of indigenous people, but includes a cross-section of the population, white Americans and Chinese, manual workers, writers and artists. There's no separate women's movement, but women are significant leaders and activists

within it, especially among the indigenous people. One of the latter, Haunani-Kay Trask, writes

while many Hawaiian men have been transforming themselves into politicians, many Hawaiian women have chosen the path of decolonization, testing their leadership in the movement for sovereignty (Trask 1993: 92).⁷

She continues

I believe the main reason women lead the nationalist front today is simply that women have not lost sight of *lahui*, that is, of the nation. Caring for the nation is, in Hawaiian belief, an extension of caring for the family that includes both our lands and our people. Our mother is our land, Papahānaumoku, she who births the islands. Hawaiian women leaders, then, are genealogically empowered to lead the nation ...[so] on the front line, in the glare of public disapproval, are our women, articulate, fierce and culturally grounded. A great coming together of women's mana has given birth to a new form of power based on a traditional Hawaiian belief: women asserting their leadership for the sake of the nation (Trask 1993: 94).

6. The United States of America

The women of the US group have a rather different role in the Network from those of the other country groups. Some of them are themselves US citizens of Asian origin, or citizens of Asian countries currently living, studying or working in America. Living in the USA, they're in a good position to monitor US militarism as mind-set and US militarization as an unfolding practice, and to provide briefings for the Network. US-based women arrange speaking engagements for women from Asia, write letters on their behalf to US government agencies, and undertake public education on these issues in the US. They share with women from other participating countries the ways in which US militarism also harms communities in the United States, especially communities of colour.

I draw here on the paper they'd prepared for the 5th international meeting which provided information requested by Philippines Working Group. First, they reported on popular political attitudes over the time of the recent presidential election. Although the outcome of the election had been a disappointment they stressed that a lot of potential Kerry supporters had been disqualified from voting and electoral fraud could not be ruled out. 'The more the country moves to the right, the issues and values seemed to become more polarized and also clearer for the centre and the left.'

⁷ Trask, Haunani-Kay (1993) *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

They reported on the invasion of Iraq -- the number of dead and wounded, the prisoners held by the USA, the legislation following 9/11 (particularly the USA PATRIOT Act and the Homeland Security Act) and its effect on democracy and liberty, and the loss of international respect and support for the USA. Many people around the world believe the US to be a threat to world peace and stability. Almost half of all Americans believe the US is less, not more, secure because of the war on Iraq.

They also presented useful figures on military spending. For example, the Pentagon budget for 2005 is \$421 billion, to which must be added a further \$26 million for invading Iraq, and another \$5 billion per month to cover the cost of ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. They gave comparative per capita military spending by country, showing that of the USA to be second only to that of Israel, almost double that of the next highest spender, Saudi Arabia, and well over twice that of the UK. As Gwyn Kirk put it in an address to an open session of our meeting

In 2004, 150 billion dollars will be expended on the military worldwide. And I'm ashamed to say that 47% of this total is US expenditure. Yet the US has the highest infant mortality rate in the industrialized world. There are two million in prison.

The US has 220,000 military personnel stationed overseas, 20,000 of them on ships. As a result it's experiencing a manpower shortage, and must increasingly call on reservists, offer military service as an alternative to incarceration, and intensify recruitment, especially among people of colour in the USA.

Women from the US reminded Network participants at the meeting that since Dick Cheney made this public in 2000, it is widely understood that official US policy is to attain 'full-spectrum dominance', which means worldwide control of land, air and sea -- and control of space. This new conceptualisation of US foreign and defence policy explains many of the phenomena reported at the meeting by women from the various regions. FSD means the shifting of bases from one country to another, and their relocation within countries.

I've mentioned above some of the effects of changes in US strategic thinking. We saw that the US military plan to move facilities near the border between South and North Korea to sites further south, offering a more effective threat to China. We were told of simulations being carried on in preparation for hostilities against North Korea or China, foreseeing the possible movement to South Korea of 600,000 US troops from Guam, Hawai'i, Okinawa, Japan and the Philippines. And soon after our meeting Aida Santos circulated the news that US and Japanese defence officials were conferring about a possible transfer of US forces from Okinawa to the Philippines.

Pro-active US strategies like these highlighted the need for co-operation between women in the different countries of the Network. But, as we've seen from the other country reports, the US is sometimes reactive too. It's not entirely immune to popular opinion and has sometimes withdrawn facilities in response to local political unrest. Nor can the administration afford to altogether ignore opposition at home. Bush's foreign policy, the arrogant way the present administration tramples on the sensibilities of less powerful countries, its negligent exploitation of the poor world, and above all its 'war on terror' are disturbing to many US citizens.

The US country report listed a lot of manifestations of activism in the USA. It mentioned two major new coalitions, the International ANSWER Coalition, and United for Peace and Justice; established peace organizations such as the War Resisters League; faith-based organizations such as the American Friends Service Committee; veterans groups and families of 9/11 victims; and a number of women's networks and local groups, some of them old, like the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, some of them new, like Code Pink. Progressive media, especially local radio stations and web sites have been specially important in mobilizing opposition to the invasion of Iraq. I gained the impression though that, as in the UK, the national mobilisations are addressed more to opposing a particular act of war than opposing militarism and militarization as such and (as Margo put it) 'non-compliance with the agenda of full-spectrum dominance'.

In her address Gwyn Kirk said of the Network:

We come from very different places in terms of power and privilege, but we share an analysis... Women's concept of security is different. What we mean by it is an environment that is sustainable for life, redistribution of wealth and human rights...

[We see] an exploitative system that generates despair, violence and self-hatred. Millions are displaced from poor regions to serve the rich. Looking in this direction things look very bad...[But] in our network we share a love of land and life, the sturdy connections of women and men, opening space for change – of hearing, imagination, creativity, connection and courage. Looking in this direction there is hope.'

Concluding notes

My contact with the East Asia, US, Puerto Rico Women's Network against Militarism occurred in two phases: first an interview with Margo Okazawa-Rey and Gwyn Kirk in California in May 2004; second, six days in Manila attending their 5th international meeting between Nov 22-28, 2004. I would like to thank the Network as a whole very warmly for permitting me to be present at their meeting.

In addition, I'd specially like to thank the following women for making time for me to interview them while we were in Manila together: Zaida Torres Rodriguez and Carmen Valencia Perez from Puerto Rico; Terri Keko'olani Raymond of Hawai'i; Yu Young-Nim, Ko You-Kyoung, and Chang Hee-Won from South Korea; Aida Santos from the Philippines; and Ada Dultra Estepa and Fatima Pir Tillah Allian from the Philippine island of Mindanao. My warmest thanks also to Don Mee-Choi, Chang Hee-won and Beatriz Herrera for helping me with interpretation in some interviews.

This profile was returned in draft to my various informants. All but one country group gave me suggestions for correcting and improving the text. Only the section on Hawai'i has not been so affirmed and should be read as provisional. Otherwise, this is a version with which my informants felt comfortable, and they have agreed to my putting it on my website so that it can be available to other interested women.

For contact details, please see Appendix.

Appendix

Organizations Affiliated to the East Asia - US - Puerto Rico Women's Network against Militarism

1. *The Philippines*

The Filipina organizations participating in the Network group together under the umbrella: 'Philippines Working Group, Manila'. Its members are:

Amnesty International – Pilipinas
amnestypilipinas@meridiantelekoms.net

BUKLOD Centre, Olongapo City
buklod@info.com.ph

Ing Makababaying Aksyon (IMA) Foundation
imafound@mozcom.com
www.ima.org.ph

Kaisa Ka
 (Pagkakaisa ng Kababaihan – Unity of Women, Philippines)
kaisa_ka98@yahoo.com

People's Task Force for Bases Clean-up / No Nukes Asia
basecln@yahoo.com
www.yonip.com/main/taskforce

WEDPRO (Women's Education, Development, Productivity and Research Organization), Quezon City
www.wedpro1989.org
wedpro.inc@pacific.net.ph

and Nagka
 (Nagkakaisang Kababaihan ng Angeles – United Women of Angeles)

WomanHealth Philippines
womanhealth87@yahoo.com

2. *South Korea*

The South Korean organizations participating in the Network group together under the umbrella: SAFE Korea, Seoul safe@jinbo.net. Its members are:

Durebang (My Sisters Place), Uijongbu
durebang@hotmail.com

Hansori
 (One Voice -- an alliance of women's groups concerned with prostitution)

Women Making Peace, Seoul
www.peacewomen.or.kr
wmp@peacewomen.or.kr

And two mixed organizations of men and women:

National Campaign to Eradicate Crime by US Troops in Korea, Seoul
us@usacrime.or.kr
www.usacrime.or.kr

Solidarity for Peace and Human Rights

3. Japan/Okinawa

Asia-Japan Women's Resource Centre, Tokyo
www.aworc.org

Japan Coalition of the US Military Bases, Yufuin, Oita
www.coara.or.jp

Okinawa Women Act against Military Violence, Naha, Okinawa
suzuyo@mx.mesh.ne.jp

4. Puerto Rico

Alianza de Mujeres Viequenses, Vieques
mujeresviequenses@hotmail.com

Casa Alianza
casaalianza@hotmail.com

Institute for Latino Empowerment, Caguas
ile@institutolatino.org

5. Hawai'i

DMZ Hawai'i / Aloha Aina
www.nohohewa.com

6. *United States*

Participating organizations:

Women's Action for New Directions (WAND), National Field Office,
Atlanta, Georgia www.wand.org

Filipino/American Coalition for Environmental Solutions (FACES), El
Cerrito, California www.facessolutions.net

Network country contact USA:

Gwyn Kirk gwyn@igc.org

This document is one of a series of local and regional profiles that will appear on this website in coming months. They are interim products a two-year research project *Women Opposing War: Organization and Strategy in the International Movement of Women against Violence and Militarism*, being carried out by the author from her base in the Department of Sociology, City University, London, during 2004/5, with the support of several charitable trusts. The profile is not intended for publication in its present form. I would be grateful if you would not quote it in published work without first seeking my agreement.

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