

Greenpeace calls for marine mammal rescue in Japan: protests new US airbase

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Today a flotilla of fishingboats and Greenpeace joined in a protest at sea at the proposed site of a new American military airbase. The proposed base would be built on top of a coral reef, destroying important marine habitats essential to the survival of the last remaining dugongs (sea cows) in Japan. Greenpeace calls for dugong rescue in Japan

Protest against American airbase intensifies

Saturday, 12 March 2005 Henoko, Okinawa (Japan) Today a flotilla of fishing boats and Greenpeace joined in a protest at sea at the proposed site of a new American military airbase. The proposed base would be built on top of a coral reef, destroying important marine habitats essential to the survival of the last remaining dugongs (sea cows) in Japan.

Flying ribbons of support from around the world, Greenpeace flagship the Rainbow Warrior has been in Okinawa since March 1st to intensify the campaign against the airbase. Greenpeace inflatable boats joined local fishing boats, kayaks and a ten-meter long floating dugong sculpture in the latest in a series of protests against the airbase.

Okinawa Governor Keiichi Inamine is visiting Washington next week, where he is due to meet US Department of Defense officials and is expected to discuss

American military bases in Okinawa.

?It is hypocritical for the United States to threaten an endangered animal such as the dugong in Japan, while it protects the dugong?s close relatives, the manatees in Florida? said John Passacantando, Greenpeace US executive director during his visit to Okinawa. ?In the US, manatees are the focus of conservation and nature preservation programs. How can we justify driving their cousins to extinction in Japan??

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As the construction is threatening Japan's last dugong population, Greenpeace is calling for the designation of a marine reserve to protect this precious animal

and its marine habitat.

"The waters of Henoko should be made a marine reserve, not an airbase," said

Greenpeace oceans campaigner Karli Thomas. "A marine reserve would not only protect biodiversity, but would be an investment in the future for Okinawa. An airbase would bring destruction, extinction and opposition."

Today marks the 2,967th day of protest in Okinawa in which local people have

fought to protect a coral reef and endangered animals.

"Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi this week reportedly indicated that the airbase will not be built," said Junichi Sato, Greenpeace Japan campaign director. "It is time for him to cancel the project completely."