

The Comment of the Mayor
“18 Years since the U.S. Military Helicopter Crash on Okinawa International University”

On August 13, 2004, 18 years ago, a serious accident in which a CH-53D helicopter belonging to the U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma crashed into flames on the main building of Okinawa International University.

The accident not only struck greatly the people of Ginowan City and Okinawa Prefecture but also highlighted again how dangerous it was for Futenma Air Station to stay right in the middle of the city.

In 1996, Japan and the U.S. agreed to the complete return of Futenma Air Station, said to be “the most dangerous base in the world,” to Okinawa “within 5 to 7 years,” because of its dangers. The agreement was symbolic as the mitigation of the burdens of the military bases on Okinawa. Nevertheless, the land was not returned, but the accident which the residents dreaded the most actually happened on August 13th 8 years after the agreement.

Although this accident made everyone to strongly think again that dangers of the U.S. military bases against people living around had to be removed immediately, the land still has not been returned today, 18 years after the accident. Moreover, a window of a U.S. military helicopter, CH-53E, fell off on Futenma Daini Elementary School in December 2017. In April 2020, fire-fighting foam containing PFOS leaked off the base and a lot of foam was scattered in the city. In August 2021, the PFAS-containing water sotoed in the Futenma Air Station to the public wastewater system despite our request to dispose thermally. In November, a water bottle fell in the urban area from a flying aircraft belonging to Futenma Air Station. The residents’ uneasiness has never be rest.

In addition, still today, the burdens of the U.S. military, including the loud noise of aircraft at night time, even in midnight, and the transportation system forced to detour the base weigh heavily on the residents in various scenes of their daily lives. It cannot be clearer that the burdens on the residents are over the limit.

The original purpose of the Land Return Agreement is to remove the dangers and to reduce the burden of military bases. Permanent use of Futenma Air Station must never be allowed.”

26 years from the agreement of land return and 18 years from the accident, the promise to return Futenma Air Station completely has not been realized. I ask that the both governments of Japan and the U.S., and all people of Okinawa and Japan take time to think about the situation in which local people’s earnest wish has been left behind and the significance of the time gone by.

Though we cannot change the past that the land is not returned, for the children’s future, I promise you that we do everything we can do to make sure the land will be returned and well-utilize the site after the return, which the people of Ginowan City and Okinawa Prefecture has dreamed of.

We must not allow Futenma Air Station to stay permanently or continue its operation in the center of the city. In order to end transferring this issue to the next generations, we will work persistently for the land to be returned at the earliest date and for alleviation of danger and the mitigation of the burdens to take place in a visible manner until the return.

August 13, 2022
Masanori Matsugawa
Mayor, City of Ginowan