

13th Session of EMRIP/Pacific and Asia Virtual Regional Meeting  
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### **Joint Statement**

Nirai Kanai nu Kai (Indigenous peoples' organization for the repatriation and aerial reburial of Ryukyuan human remains into original Ryukyuan graves)

Shimin Gaikou Centre

Haisai chu uganabira.

My name is Yasukatsu Matsushima, one of the representatives of Nirai Kanai nu Kai (Indigenous peoples' organization for the repatriation and aerial reburial of Ryukyuan human remains into original Ryukyuan graves). Currently, Ryukyu (Okinawa) has the highest number of people infected by COVID-19 per 100,000 population in Japan. One of the reasons for this is the US military bases, which have caused the secondary infection from the military personnel, and the relevant information such as infection routes is also unclear. Under this difficult situation of COVID-19, we have engaged in the repatriation movement of our ancestral human remains to bring peace to ancestors' spirits. However, the measures to address COVID-19 have restricted such rights movement of Indigenous peoples, making it difficult to protect international human rights and to engage in the work for it.

In 1929, Associate Professor Takeo Kanaseki at Kyoto Imperial University took Ryukyuan human remains from graves in several locations in Okinawa islands with no consent from the bereaved families and local residents. After May 2017, I requested the access to the information about, and the repatriation of the Ryukyuan human remains kept at Kyoto University, but my requests have been refused because the university "will not answer individual inquiries." On 4 December 2018, I, along with other plaintiffs, filed a lawsuit against Kyoto University by requesting the return of and compensation for the stolen Ryukyuan human remains.

In July 2019, in its "Letter of Request" to Kyoto University, the Anthropological Society of Nippon refused the repatriation and requested the continuation of academic research on these human remains by recognizing them as "ancient human skeletons" subject to research. In 1903, the Society caused "Academic Anthropological Pavillion Incident," by putting Ryukyuan, Ainu and Indigenous peoples in Taiwan on exhibition, but the Society has not reviewed nor apologized for this Incident.

In March 2019, National Taiwan University transferred 63 bodies of the Ryukyuan human remains to Okinawa Prefectural Board of Education, supported by Chiwas Ali (Indigenous Atayal people), a member of the Taiwanese Legislature, and by the Chinese Ryukyu Study Society.

However, in July 2020, ignoring the bereaved families' requests of the repatriation and aerial reburial, the Board illegally measured and investigated these human remains, which are not designated as cultural property.

Around the same time, National Taiwan University returned 64 bodies of human remains of the Bunun, an Indigenous people in Taiwan, and accepted their reburial. However, the repatriation and aerial reburial of the Ryukyuan ancestral human remains were refused by this University.

Grave robbery, storage, and research of our ancestors' human remains by academic institutions have deeply damaged our funerary practices, spiritual world, peace of mind, and dignity as peoples. That also violates the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, especially Article 12 concerning the rights to religious traditions and customs, as well as repatriation of human remains.

COVID-19 has also brought issues in the trial processes and the repatriation movement of human remains. The trial dates at Kyoto District Court were postponed. While the public seats at the large courtroom had been fully occupied in every trial before, the number of them have been considerably reduced due to COVID-19. Many gatherings and study meetings for the repatriation of Ryukyuan human remains have also been postponed, or scaled-down. The movements of many supporters in Ryukyu and Kanto have been restricted as well, and they have not been able to attend trials. As such, to a great extent, COVID-19 has limited the exercise of the Ryukyuan peoples' right to the repatriation of human remains, which is recognized under international law.

Ippee nifée deebitan.

For the "Prohibition of Ritual Incident" of the Ryukyuan human remains, please watch the video in the following URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LMwabRhZ3jQ>

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