

Statement from Bishop Kang Woo Il (Catholic Bishop from Jeju Island, Chairman of Korea Priest Assembly)

For the past four years Gangjeong Village has been resisting the naval base building project in their home sea. For years Gangjeong village has been called Il-Gangjeong by Jeju natives due to its outstanding ocean scenery and well preserved nature. Recently a lot of Gangjeong citizens have moved out, so the current population of the village is about 1500, which is a small number compared to the entire population of Jeju Island.

This small village has been quite alone in its opposition to the construction of the naval base. Now they have reached a point of physical and spiritual exhaustion, and at this time, all over the nation, people from many different organizations, as well as well-known social activists, are joining the people of Gangjeong Village in the movement to resist the construction of the base. We are encouraged by and thankful for this support.

The people of Gangjeong Village and Jeju Island want to share why we are opposed to the construction of a naval base. In 1948, already 63 years ago, the people of Jeju Island suffered from the 4-3 (April 3) Massacre. At that time over 30,000 civilians, including children and the elderly, were killed by their own military. Innocent civilians were cruelly massacred in such a way that this incident has become nationally recognized as a genocide. The government has continually admitted these mistakes of the past, apologized, and asked for forgiveness from the victims who lost their lives, in order that the next generation will learn from this event and ensure that Korea will never again experience this kind of tragedy.

A military base on this kind of land, a naval base in this island – a naval base with all of the latest weapons collected in one place, including the Aegis and aircraft carriers, creating a great concentration of military power – it simply does not make sense to be in Jeju Island. The reason that the citizens of Gangjeong Village and Jeju Island are resisting the construction of this military base is not just because it is a Jeju issue. We also see this as a peace issue for the whole nation, and not even just our country, but also an issue for China, Japan and Korea – countries that have not yet been able to overcome the conflicts between them. If this military base becomes a reality, it will only stimulate a larger conflict in Northeast Asia. We believe that this is not healthy for the peace of Korea, for Northeast Asia, and for the whole world.

Please continue to support the people of Gangjeong Village. If more people in the nation start to have more understanding and awareness about this issue, it can be the one reward for the suffering of the people in Gangjeong Village. We hope that from this point on, you will take an active role in this struggle.

Thank you.