

With solidarity, from Jeju to Bhubaneswar

Sung-Hee Choi

Dear residents in Jagatsinghpur,

I am a woman activist living in South Korea, the country of the POSCO you oppose. I am currently being jailed in Jeju prison, under the charge of 'interruption of business', because of my resistance against the enforcement of the naval base construction in Jeju Island, located in the south of South Korea. Today, 3 July 2011, is the 46th day since my arrest, and 44th day since being restrained.

I accidentally happened to see two of your struggle photos, one of which in the Korean Times, 13 June 2011, had the following caption underneath it:

'Anti POSCO action in India: A villager sprays water to relieve children lying with other villagers along the entry point to prevent policemen and officials from entering their area at Jagatsinghpur district, about 140 kilometers (87 miles) east of eastern Bhubaneswar, India, Saturday. The villagers have been protesting against turning their farmland into an industrial developed area for a USD 12 billion steel plant of South Korean conglomerate POSCO (AP-Yonhap).'

The situation of Gangjeong village, Jeju Island, where I, along with many others, wanted to prevent the naval base construction, is very much like yours. The Gangjeong villagers who have fought for four years to save their village are keeping vigil day and night against any sudden crackdown by the navy and construction companies (Samsung and Daerim etc.).

Their fight is not just about land grabbing--the ecology system is equally important, and the construction of the naval base will destroy the entire ecosystem. If trucks come, they block them with their bodies and if ships come, they resist them by swimming to them. Recently, a movie critic named Yang Yoon-Mo had a total of 76 days' fast, including 60 days' prison fast, against the naval base. The Gangjeong village itself is an ecology-excellent village while the Gangjeong Sea is inhabited by UNESCO-protected soft corals. The naval base construction site in the Gangjeong village is the habitat of endangered species such as red feet crabs and small round frogs. But the navy has expropriated more than 51 percent of the villagers' land and threatened them so that they could not get the deposited money as indemnity.

The Jeju naval base would make Jeju, 'the Peace Island' into 'the War Island', and would destroy peace in northeast Asia, and farther afield, which is why not just Gangjeong villagers, but many people are opposing it.

I could not help but feel great sadness and anger over the fact that a big South Korean conglomerate is to rob and destroy your lands. POSCO is one of the big, infamous corporations, along with Samsung, which has oppressed its workers, with its no-labor union policy.

Since POSCO would destroy not only the environment of your hometown, but also your right to life, your struggle is 'legitimate self-defense'. Just as my action should not be called 'interruption of business', but 'legitimate self-defense'.

Expressing my anger at POSCO and my apology to you, I also send you my warm comradeship, respect, condolence and encouragement. Your courage and urgency inspire me.

Wholeheartedly supporting your struggle to save your hometown and your right to live without reckless developmentalism and neo-liberalism, I pray for the success of your struggle.

In solidarity,

Sung-Hee Choi

3 July 2011

Footnote: Ms Sung-Hee Choi is a peace activist for Gangjung village, Jeju and an advisor to the South Korea to Global Network against Weapons and Nuclear Power in Space. She was finally released from prison on 17 August 2011.