

Pacific Peace Conference and Australian Speaking Tour of Pacific Peace Network activists.

From July 28th to the 4th August 2023, a delegation of Pacific Peace activists participated in a one-day conference in Brisbane then went on to speak at events in Sydney Canberra and Darwin. The peace delegation visit coincided with the largest ever US led Talisman Sabre exercise in Australia with over 30 thousand troops participating. The so-called exercise is held in the Central Queensland Shoalwater Bay designated military training precinct.

This is not the first time that activists from around the Pacific have campaigned against Talisman Sabre. In 2007, for example, a Peace Convergence that actually travelled to the Shoalwater Bay area was convened when people from a range of Pacific States gathered to witness US and Australian troops training for war. As with the 2023 Speaking Tour, participants were able also to share their own experiences of war and the presence of US bases in their countries.

The tour began when Pacific Peace Speaking Tour delegates, Monaeka Flores from Guahan (Guam), Shinako Oyakawa from Ryukyu (Okinawa) and Arama Rata (Aotearoa), were welcomed for lunch and a sharing of experiences on Friday 29 June by staff from the Qld Nurses and Midwives Union.

This was followed by a very meaningful and valued Fireside Gathering and Welcome meal at the Aboriginal Sovereign Embassy fire. Here, participants heard Boe Spearim, a Gamilaraay and Koomaman, talk of his experiences as an activist. Boe is a journalist who produces and hosts the podcast entitled Frontier Wars.

During the Pacific Peace conference in Brisbane on Saturday 29 July, with Karina Lester (South Australia), and Tiana Hippolite (Pacific Diaspora) the visitors – Arama, Shinako and Monaeka – spoke to over 80 conference attendees about the destructive impact of imperialism, colonisation and war, and the exploitation of their people and environment through nuclear testing, establishment of US military bases, military exercises on their lands, and war waste, as well as their people's resistance and activism in opposition to the continuing occupation of their lands for military purpose.

The conference also heard from Non-indigenous panellists. Emeritus Professor Richard Tanter (University of Melbourne Nautilus Institute), Michelle Maloney (Australian Earth Laws Alliance), Dimity Hawkins (co-founder of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons), and Greens Senator David Shoebridge spoke of the complicity of successive Australian governments in this exploitation through Australia's role as a sub imperial military power in support of a dominating USA and UK "rules-based order" in the region. Reference was also made to a lack of democratic decision making about Australian military policy and practices and the limitation on opposing voices in the Australian mainstream media.

The panellists noted the expansion of Australia's military complex using public funds, including AUKUS and the nuclear submarine deal, expansion of the Tindal RAAF base for USA B52 bombers, planned purchase of long-range missiles with strike capability, Talisman Sabre and Rim of the Pacific Exercises. These developments have turned Australia's defence into offence without public consultation and debate.

There was consensus at the conference on the importance of First Nations' Peoples sovereignty as well as youth engagement, linking the peace movement to their actions for environmental protection; supporting unions in opposition to AUKUS and east coast nuclear

submarine ports; pressuring government to sign the Nuclear Ban Treaty (TPNW) ; and opposing Australia's expanding industrial military complex and involvement in war through engagement in public debate on peace and environmental protection.

A statement from the Conference endorsed by the 80 people attending was as follows:

From this conference we stand together for Peace throughout the Pacific and the world. People in all pacific states and countries demand the right to genuine security which includes removing the threats of War, catastrophic climate change impacts, injustice and discrimination and to address the rights of indigenous people.

We call for cooperation not competition to achieve genuine security and an end to the military exercise Talisman Sabre currently underway in Australia where 30T military personnel are rehearsing for war. We commit to growing our knowledge understandings, connections and friendships among the people who share the waters of the Pacific Ocean.

Naek Flores and Shinako Oyakawa then set off on a hectic speaking tour visiting Sydney Canberra and Darwin.

Sydney, Monday 31 July the Justice and Peace Office was pleased to host, with Independent and Peaceful Australia Network (IPAN), a visit of two women from the islands of Guahan (Guam) and Ryukyu (Okinawa).

Monaeka Flores and Shinako Oyakawa are both members of the First Nations communities on these islands and live daily with the impact of colonisation and the appropriation of scarce land for military purposes. This has resulted in devastating environmental consequences. The heavy-footed presence of the US military on Guam has been responsible for the poisoning of the land with PFAS and the loss of all bird life. The stories of both women have a new resonance in Australia, as the United States military relocates some military assets from Guam to bases around Darwin.

Military bases do not exist in a vacuum and their presence in remote locations may be 'out of sight, out of mind' but has a harmful impact on communities and ecosystems.

You can watch edited videos of their remarks or stream the audio of the entire event below.

<https://justiceandpeace.org.au/peace-activists-visit-sydney/>

Canberra in the Australian Capital Territory hosted the next leg of the speaking tour.

On the evening of the 1st, Monaeka and Shinako were the first speakers at a public forum on The Dangers of AUKUS, organised by IPAN ACT and held at the Australian National University. Each woman spoke about the lengthy history of colonisation of their islands by the US (and others), and the establishment of large numbers of US military bases in both Guam and Okinawa. They also spoke eloquently and with passion about the numerous devastating effects of US colonisation and militarisation on local indigenous communities and environments, including

(1) the loss of sovereignty, autonomy and self-determination;

- (2) the appropriation and destruction of indigenous ancestral land;
- (3) the siphoning of resources away from urgent local needs, including to improve local welfare, to address climate change and to respond to increasingly severe and numerous typhoons and other corollaries of climate change. Monaeka, for example, told of the distress of witnessing trucks being used to expand military installations, when they were urgently needed for recovery from the most recent typhoon;
- (4) the aggravation of climate change through the military's use of fossil fuels; and
- (5) other direct impacts of the large military presence. Shinako, for example, highlighted the high rate of sex crimes committed by US military personnel, the noise pollution of military aircraft flying over densely populated urban centres, and the loss of civilian lives due to military aircraft crashes.

Both women emphasised that these harmful effects of militarisation are experienced on a continuing and daily basis. They also talked of the threats of war that are exacerbated by increased militarisation in the Pacific.

In any war between US and China, Monaeka emphasised, the US military bases on Guam and Okinawa mean that they will be 'first strike' targets for China. Once they have been destroyed, Australia will be next.

Monaeka further emphasised the connections between Australia, Guam and Okinawa as colonised lands and peoples, and called on Australian activists to bring indigenous people and their concerns into the centre of the peace movement. Monaeka and Shinako were followed by Marcus Strom, the convenor of Labor Against War, Wanning Sun, Professor of Media and Communication Studies at the University of Technology, Sydney, and Greens Senator David Shoebridge.

More than 150 people attended the Forum, and afterwards, numerous people commented positively on the quality of the speakers, and the balance between them.

The following day Kathryn Kelly and David Perkins of IPAN accompanied Shinako and Monaeka to Parliament House. They met with Parliamentarians from Labor Greens and Independents. Monaeka emphasized that the Australian Government needs to know that 'we don't support US militarisation and colonisation'. Monaeka and Shinako stressed that we need human security rather than national security and also talked about pollution, sexual violence from US marines and global heating.

Greens Senator David Shoebridge did a short interview with Monaeka and Shinako for social media, and they had a meeting with the Australian Government's Foreign Minister Penny Wong's Deputy Chief of Staff where Monaeka and Shinako talked about issues of concern and asked if they were implementing the principle of Prior Informed Consent. They said that Australia has a powerful role to play for peace in the Pacific and proposed a Pacific Women's Peace Conference, perhaps held in the Philippines.

Darwin Top End for Peace (TEPA) and Base Watch hosted a public forum at Charles Darwin University

The public meeting drew a small but passionate crowd. Locals responded very well to the guest speakers. It was good to have Henk Rumbewas in attendance - a local West Papuan advocate who has visited Guam and is keen to also deepen ties with Okinawa. There was strong positive feedback from attendees who found the public meeting a powerful exposition.

We were pleased to visit the studios of the ABC the next day, and it was good timing to comment on the new announcement of a USAF operations centre in Darwin. The visitors spoke very well on both radio and television. We took Shinako for a tour around the Barracks, and I was surprised to realise how much new construction had gone on since I last visited. It was good to enjoy spending some downtime with the guests. I think these efforts at regional solidarity are some of our strongest tools.

All of these events took place during the largest ever US led Talisman Sabre exercise with over 30 thousand troops rehearsing for war.

We in IPAN and the Pacific Peace Network extend our thanks to Monaeka and Shinako in particular for gifting their time away from their families, work and homes, and also extend our apologies for working them so hard- a strong lesson for us all to ensure we care for each other in this long march to peace and genuine security free from the threat of war and environmental catastrophe.

Photos



Brisbane Conference



Protest at Enoggera Army Barracks



Sydney Catholic Peace Office



Canberra