



International appeal to save Japan's peace constitution – Peace Boat and the Global Article 9 Campaign strongly condemn the gutting of Article 9

On July 1, Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo and his administration forced through a Cabinet decision that changes the government's long-standing interpretation of war-renouncing Article 9 of the Constitution, loosening Japan's restraints on the use of force and allowing the exercise of the right of collective self-defense.

Article 9 is the famous peace clause by which Japan renounces war and prohibits the use of force as means of settling international disputes. Adopted following WWII, Article 9 is a pledge to Japan itself and to the world, particularly to neighboring countries that suffered under Japanese invasions and colonial rule, to never repeat its mistakes. Article 9 has been widely recognized as a regional and international peace mechanism that has contributed to maintaining peace and stability in Northeast Asia and served as a legal framework to promote peace, disarmament and sustainability. Its nomination for this year's Nobel Peace Prize pays tribute to the important role Article 9 plays as a tool for peace.

Abe's path to militarism

Claimed to be a component of a new doctrine of "pro-active pacifism", the Cabinet decision is part of Abe's overall right-wing, revisionist and militarist agenda, aimed at bolstering the country's security and military posture regionally and internationally, indicated by his slogan of "escaping the postwar regime." Over the last few months, Abe has passed a number of decisions that challenge the country's longstanding peace policies, including revamping defense guidelines, increasing the country's military budget and abandoning the long-held ban on arms export, to name a few. In yet another controversial initiative, Abe also intends to relax Japan's official development assistance charter to lift current restrictions against providing ODA to foreign military entities – a move that threatens again to reverse some of Japan's traditional peace-oriented positions.

Japan's constitutionalism and democracy in jeopardy

Domestically, the move represents a "political coup": it overturns consistent interpretation by all administrations of the past decades, bypasses the due democratic process for constitutional amendment that requires a national referendum, and disregards broad public opinion, which, according to successive polls, disapproves of the intent and method of reinterpretation by a large margin.

Although symbolically significant, the decision does not yet have the force of law. More than a dozen laws still act as clear legal barriers to constitutional reinterpretation and will need to be amended by parliament to enact the change. It is now critical for the country's democracy that the people of Japan, who have in large number protested publicly against Abe's Cabinet decision, follow this process and ensure that legislations are not changed to violate the peace principles enshrined in Article 9.

Peace in Northeast Asia on the brink?

At the regional level, Article 9 has served as the foundation for collective security for the entire Asia Pacific region.

In today's context of tensions in Northeast Asia – notably between Japan, China and the Koreans over territorial disputes, historical recognition issues and nuclear weapons programs, and against the background of rising nationalism in an area of the world still caught in Cold War structures – the decision to reinterpret Article 9 threatens to further destabilize the fragile peace in the region.

The decision to lift restrictions on Japan's exercise of the right to collective self-defense is a key component of US-Japan security cooperation, including the revision of defense cooperation guidelines scheduled to take place later this year. Japan's increased participation in Washington's 'Pivot to Asia' is sought to act as a deterrent against China, but is in fact likely to heighten regional rivalries and further antagonize China.

Indeed, reactions to the Cabinet decision, notably by China and South Korea, already alienated by Japanese provocations on historical and reconciliation issues such as controversial remarks on "comfort women" and official visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, show that escalation is already taking place. It is now a matter of urgency to prevent the situation from getting out of control, triggering an arms race and leading to an actual confrontation.

Peace Boat and the Global Article 9 Campaign, alarmed by the combination of nationalism, historical revisionism and militarism that have time and again proven destructive,

- strongly condemn Prime Minister Abe's moves to reinterpret Article 9, and in particular the July 1 Cabinet decision that fundamentally changes the reading of the Constitution, guts Article 9 of its principles and steps away from Japan's traditionally restrained defense policy;

- decry this fundamental attack on Japanese democracy that needs to be challenged both inside and outside of Japan, and demand that the Japanese government respect the constitution and fully ensure public participation in any upcoming legislative processes;

- call on the people of Japan and beyond to publicly reiterate their commitment to a peaceful Japan, and oppose Japan becoming "a country that can wage war" that could be perceived as a threat by peoples around the world, especially in neighboring countries;

- express our pride in Japan's constitution as an international mechanism for peace. We are determined to reclaim the true meaning of "proactive pacifism" to realize the principles of Article 9, such as disarmament and non-military solutions to disputes through dialogue, mediation, prevention measures and international laws;

- welcome and support the strong movement of protest in Japan against Abe's decision and encourage Japanese civil society to remain mobilized to prevent further legislations from lifting restraints on Japan's military capability and activities, instead ensuring that Japan's peace commitments are strengthened;

- express our utmost concerns at the possible repercussions the decision will have for peace and stability in the region and call on the people of Japan, the region and beyond to:

- stop the vicious circles of regional tensions, provocations and rising nationalisms that are fueling each other;

- promote dialogue and mutual understanding among East Asian countries for both reconciliation and prevention;

- and engage in efforts to build confidence and establish mechanisms for peace in Northeast Asia.

Sign the international petition: Save Japan's Peace Constitution http://is.gd/save_article_9

Peace Boat: <http://www.peaceboat.org>

Global Article 9 Campaign: <http://www.article-9.org>

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