

# Airing Dirty Laundry

The Louisville Clothesline Project, which is celebrating 22 years of advocacy and service, brings attention to widespread abuse of women and is so named for the visual representation of “airing dirty laundry,” giving women a voice, letting perpetrators know that women will no longer be silent and educating the public about widespread abuse.

Renee Campbell, executive director of National Mission Institution Wesley House Community Services in Louisville, Ky., participated in the United Methodist Women–sponsored delegation to the United Nations’ Commission on the Status of Women. During the delegation, Campbell became aware of women in Okinawa, Japan, who had been raped and/or killed by U.S. service members and decided it was important to include a tribute to Okinawan victims of rape in the Clothesline Project.

The Pentagon reports 737 U.S. military bases around the world. Including undisclosed bases, researchers estimate this number to be almost 1,000. The impact of these military bases on the local communities in places such as Japan, South Korea, Philippines and Iraq is devastating. The demand for “entertainment” for military personnel in the form of strip clubs and brothels is high around these military bases.

In Okinawa, 20 percent of the Okinawan land is occupied by 38 U.S. military facilities with more under construction, despite persistent local opposition. The Okinawa Women Act Against Military Violence has compiled a timeline listing hundreds of cases of sexual assault by U.S. troops in Okinawa, dating from 1945. On Sept. 4, 1995, a 12-year-old girl was on her way home and was abducted by three U.S. servicemen in a car. Her hands, eyes and mouth bound with duct tape, she was raped, dumped out of the car and left by the side of a road. This incident was one more in a long history of violence against women and has continued in Okinawa throughout the postwar period. The rape of this girl was reported worldwide, but most crimes by U.S. troops (including rape, assault and murder) are not.



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