

World Peace Begins at Gangjeong: Breaking the Fallacy of the National Security versus Environment Argument

Kathryn Kintzele Gwiazdon, Esq., J.D.

“This is none of your concern. This is national security.” – Youngbae Suh, Chair of the Korean National Committee, International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

INTRODUCTION

Is this true? When environmental and human issues of global significance conflict with a nation-state’s “national security”, is it none of the rest of the world’s concern? Is this the trump card that silences all contending issues, all violated rights, all failures in responsibility? What is even more interesting is that this statement came from a representative of nature, a leader in the oldest and largest international environmental organization in the world, IUCN. Is this the world’s best advocate for nature, for sustainability, so firmly rooted in human rights? No, it is not. This article will show you some of the people who are though, who are true “environmental defenders”, true defenders of a better way forward, a more secure way forward.

Ethics is the foundation of law and the justice system. What is right, what is wrong, what are your rights, what are your responsibilities, and when does accountability attach, if at all? But of course ethics and law goes beyond the domain of individual action and accountability into that of nation-states, corporations, organizations, and communities. For example, what are the responsibilities of nation-states when issues of sovereignty and national security confront environmental and species protection, as well as the integrity, culture and life of a particular village? Where do human rights and democracy stand when confronted with millions of dollars in development and investment, arguably veined with political corruption? Is it possible for

states to protect their borders, while destroying the very people, places and principles that make a state worth protecting? And what are the responsibilities of other nation-states, of private corporations and international organizations? They bear witness, they accept donations, but for what purpose, and at what cost?

In an increasingly militarized planet, this article will focus on the fallacy of the national security versus environment argument. Through the *Relato* methodology, it will show how protecting the environment, culture, and well-being of individuals and communities creates national security. It is the proliferation of justice and democracy that will protect a state, not the proliferation of fear, intimidation, and military might. It is time to re-define “national security”. There is not a nation on Earth that is made more secure when their citizen’s rights are destroyed.

Relatos are place-based roots of ethical engagement, advanced for the last eight years through the Biosphere Ethics Initiative, a soft law program of the Ethics Specialist Group of the IUCN World Commission on Environmental Law. They are meetings that bring together local and global leaders in all disciplines to seek the ethical underpinnings of an issue [or issues] of a particular community, organization, or even nation-state. These meetings are held on-site, as bearing witness is a key component of the methodology. Since 2004, and in addition to several developmental meetings, there have been six formal *Relatos*: Chicago Wilderness *Relato* (2007); the South African National Parks *Relato* (2008); the Indiana Dunes *Relato* (2009); the *Relato* of Jordan (2011); the Rio State *Relato* (2011); and the Gangjeong Village *Relato* (September 2012). *Relatos* work with the local communities to identify their particular aims, but most include drafting a local ethic to highlight existing ethical action and to guide future policy, and all inform the global document of the program, the *Evolving Biosphere Ethic*.

As a case study, this article will focus on the most recent *Relato* that took place surrounding the IUCN World Conservation Congress (IUCN Congress) in Jeju, South Korea, and a small indigenous village that continues to face the most powerful forces on earth: money and militarization (for the two cannot be separated). Due to the sensitive and highly controversial nature of this case, it is important to note that many facts, reports and incidents are heavily disputed. Korean scientists are afraid to place their names on findings due to state jobs, research grants and harassment. Non-Korean experts and supporters face deportation or arrest every time they try to enter the country to conduct environmental impact research, to help the local community, or to simply get the word out to the international community. This article is an attempt to sift through the myriad of corruption, threats and personal and professional assaults, yet highlight that it is indeed happening, and focus on the complaints made by the village, the responses of the government, and how international law plays an integral role. Quotes, unless otherwise noted, were personally or publically received during the *Relato*. Please also note that although many violations of Korean law have been claimed and witnessed, they will not be the focus of this article.

This article will open with a brief background on Gangjeong Village, their history and their current struggle. It will ask, “What principles is the ROK securing by building their military base?”, and discuss the human and natural rights at stake, and how even legal procedures such as EIAs and the democratic vote are deemed meaningless when corrupted. The next section will then discuss the role of the international community, and how national security, particularly when it advances the destruction of people, culture, and environment, is an international affair. This last section will also discuss the role of IUCN in the Gangjeong Village issue, and the

increasingly common occurrence of how accepting money can conflict with organizational purpose.

What is happening in Gangjeong Village is a local issue, a regional issue, a national issue, an international issue. Myself and several colleagues witnessed this struggle firsthand, and continue to follow the issue closely. I say with conviction: these are the kind of people that the Republic of Korea, that the world, should be embracing, celebrating, and learning from. These are the kind of people and this is the kind of place the world needs to protect to *prevent* collapse. There is a saying among the villagers, “World peace begins at Gangjeong.” World peace: now that is national security.

THE MILITARIZATION OF PEACE ISLAND

The Republic of Korea (ROK) has begun construction on a massive military complex at the southern end of Jeju Island in a small fishing village known as Gangjeong Village. The “Civilian-Military Complex Tour Beauty” project is a 50-hectare naval installation, estimated to house more than 8,000 marines, up to 20 warships, several submarines, and cruise liners.

Gangjeong Village, also known as the Village of Water, on the island of Jeju, also known as Peace Island, is a coastal area home to thousands of species of plants and animals, lava rock freshwater tide pools (“Gureombi”), endangered soft coral reefs, freshwater springs, sacred natural sites, historic burial grounds, and nearly 2,000 indigenous villagers, including farmers, fishermen, and *Haenyo* women divers, that have lived sustainably with the surrounding marine and terrestrial environment for nearly 4000 years. It has been named an Ecological Excellent Village by the Ministry of Environment, ROK for its global, regional, national and local significance, and it shares the island with a UNESCO designated Biosphere Reserve and Global

Geological Park, as well as being in close proximity to three World Heritage Sites and numerous other protected areas. This includes Tigre Isle, a Biosphere Reserve just off the coast of Gangjeong, and in the direct path of the warships.

In addition, numerous endangered species live in and around Gangjeong Village, including the Boreal Digging Frog (*Kaloula borealis*) listed on IUCN's Red List of Threatened Species; the red-footed crab (*Sesarma intermedium*); the endemic Jeju fresh water shrimp (*Caridina denticulate keunbaei*); and the nearly extinct Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins. It is important to also note the global uniqueness of the Jeju Soft Coral habitats, designated as Natural Monument 422 of Korea: the only location in the world known to have temperate octocoral species forming a flourishing ecosystem on a substrate of andesite. This ecosystem has provided ecological balance to the Jeju marine environment and to the development of the human culture of Gangjeong Village for thousands of years.

One of the lead scientists of recent dives (August 2012) stated, "As a specialist in Octocorallia (soft corals), it is my duty, and my honor, to help the local villagers defend their environment and their way of life, and their beautiful octocorals to which I am so devoted. I have been studying Octocorallia all around the world, in both the Atlantic (Florida, Puerto Rico, Belize, Mexico, Jamaica, Bermuda) and the Pacific (the Philippines, Australia, Fiji, New Caledonia, Thailand, Chuuk, Hawaii, Japan and Okinawa) for 42 years. I can state unequivocally, based on my personal observations and a review of pertinent scientific literature, that Jeju's octocoral assemblages are unique, spectacular, and worthy of special protection. They form the largest and most spectacular temperate Octocoral forests known on Earth. Jeju's soft coral habitat has not been reported outside of Korea. Its existence is yet unknown to the international soft coral society." It is important to note that scientists are no longer allowed near any of the

installation sites, a major concern as the government's Environmental Impact Assessment was found inaccurate.

Environmental rights, indigenous rights, cultural rights, gender rights, endangered species, human rights, social justice, sacred sites, burial grounds, traditional knowledge ... all are under assault, and sometimes quite literally. The violations are innumerable, from misplacement and mishandling of endangered species, lack of catchment nets when dredging, paying off entire sects for their silence... it would take a book, or a legal case before the International Court of Justice, to properly address all of the crimes.

Peace activists (including several Catholic priests and other religious clergymen) are harassed and abused multiple times day and night, from anywhere between 200-400 policemen, and political imprisonment and indefinite detentions have also been reported by several human rights organizations, most notably by the South Korean Human Rights Monitor in "Case of Gangjeong: Good Example of Worst Governance" (Yon Suh 2012).

For example, the government currently gives the impression that this project had the consent of the citizens of Gangjeong. On April 26, 2007, the previous mayor held a small referendum and only marketed it to supporters. 87 villagers were present, and for the first time, counted a vote through clapping. This is the vote the ROK continues to cite as the support of Gangjeong.

However, a second, and public, referendum was held on August 20, 2007 where 725 villagers voted, 680 voted against, 36 voted for, and 9 votes were defective. Therefore, 94% of voters were in opposition of the project. This second referendum is not recognized by the government.

Over the past few years, the issue has also led to several deportations. Those directly involved with this *Relato* included Dr. Imok Cha, a highly respected oncologist based in the United States.

Dr. Cha was deported on September 4th for the first time in her life. She was invited as a panelist to the official WCEL workshop on the Gangjeong issue. She was helping the villagers to understand the government's EIA and the scientific gaps of the document. In addition, Umisedo Yutaka and Matsushima Yusuke were deported on September 6th. They are members of Save the Dugong of Okinawa, Japan, listed partners of Save Jeju Now, one of the most recognized networks affiliated with the villagers.

A NEW SHADE OF GREEN

“This is the world's first green military base!” – pro-base signs and supporters at the IUCN Congress

Is that even possible? If so, who has defined “green”, and exactly what is its definition? It seems that even militarization is jumping on the green bandwagon. Which forces us to address a much larger issue concerning green-washing: the financial sponsorship by construction and development firms for pro-environmental *coloring*. Many years ago, this was the same concern with the term “sustainable development”: the appropriation and misuse of the term for financial benefit. Now we can add green growth, green economy, green development... green.

Samsung and Hyundai, two of the major developers of the naval installation, were formal “Congress Partners” of the IUCN Congress. Indeed, the long list of corporate supporters was not even made public on the Congress website until the Congress began, and with their names on every press event banner and on every single registration pass, it did not go unnoticed by the participants. For many, it was too much a reminder of the IUCN Congress in Barcelona, when membership unsuccessfully called for the organization to break its 5-year collaborative

partnership agreement with Shell due to the company's record of harm to communities and the environment.

Now, this money given to IUCN may not have raised eyebrows outside of the standard “green-washing” concern when corporations give money to environmental organizations, but as they, alongside the ROK, which reportedly gave IUCN nearly \$21 million to host the event, were also the major developers in the naval base, alongside IUCN leadership's continued lack of response on the Gangjeong issue before the Congress, this financial arrangement demands a call for accountability and further inquiry. Did sponsorship equal censorship? Was this a case of money for silence, or ineptitude of IUCN leadership to ignore a global human and environmental crisis just 7 kilometers away from the Congress site? Or perhaps the ROK gave IUCN the same argument as Youngbae Suh, “This is none of your concern. This is national security.” This last point was suggested in a local newspaper of the village, *Gangjeong Village Story* on August 1, 2012, “[IUCN has] cowered before the Lee Myung Bak administration, conceding in an official [IUCN] statement that the government ‘has a responsibility for its own national security, particularly given geopolitical sensitivities in its region’” (Ahn, Christine and Mueller, Anders Riel 2012). The article continues, “not only have national security interests blinded South Korea's justice system, they appear to have silenced the world's oldest and largest environmental organization from taking a more principled stand to protect nature and traditional livelihoods” (Ahn, Christine and Mueller, Anders Riel 2012).

This does point to a much larger issue, however: where is the accountability when organizations who advocate for environmental, social and cultural rights take large sums of money, and then modify through actions and inactions their originating mission and resolutions? The BEI continues to advocate that all parties from all sectors be “at the table” to discuss future solutions,

but each party must come from an honest and transparent place. That is an ethical condition before any future collaboration should take place.

Outside of IUCN, the ROK continues to throw money and marketing into “green development”, seeking international recognition for being “green” (note, President Lee Myung-bak is the former CEO of Hyundai Engineering and Construction). They continue to market Jeju to tourists as being the natural jewel of the country, and the world, while at the same time the construction has arguably violated nearly every principle protecting human and natural communities. For some context into their definition of “green”, their major Four Rivers Project, another “green” project, destroyed thousands of acres of wetlands and straightened major wild rivers. It was heralded as the worst wetland project of the year at the 2012 Ramsar Convention. This type of behavior, to prey on organizations that need money, or to deceive your citizens with green-washed massive development projects, not only creates national insecurity, it creates international insecurity.

THE NEW IMPERIALISTS

“It worries me greatly when support [of a motion] comes from outside a country when there is a lack of support from inside.” – former IUCN President Ashok Khosla (2008-2012)

In seemingly similar statements to Youngbae Suh’s, IUCN President Khosla publicly addressed the first Contact Group of Motion 181 to make the comparison that the supporters of the motion were like the imperialists of old. Motion 181, or *World Appeal to Protect the People, Nature, Culture and Heritage of Gangjeong Village*, was drafted by the Ethics Specialist Group alongside villagers and other supporters. Contact groups are created to discuss and come to agreement over the final text of controversial motions before they are voted upon. Motion 181 had a record 35 member organizations listed as sponsors when submitted for vote, two from the

ROK. It is important to note that nearly all Korean participants at the Congress were approached and funded in some manner by the ROK. The two sponsors from the ROK denied that money so they could “say what they want.”

President Khosla’s statement not only offended the international supporters and the two Korean supporters, but before the Congress, over 250 Korean non-IUCN member organizations had sent letters to President Khosla, asking for attention to this matter. His lack of response, coupled with these statements, made them feel disrespected and disregarded. Again, this issue, brought up in this *Relato*, in this one location in the world, holds larger implications: what is the role of international organizations if not to address issues such as human rights and environmental crimes? And even more importantly, what is the role of other nation-states and individuals, concerned for a common future? Are they to stand outside the border, not concerned, not caring? This again comes to a revised terminology, are international actors now “imperialists”?

As one of the key lawyers helping the villagers with the IUCN Congress, alongside most notably Shauna Lange, a US-based attorney, Ana di Pangracio from Argentina, and Harry Jonas of South Africa, the question was often posed [by the Korean government], “Do you even know Korean law?” Is that where justice stops? At borders?

The entire field of international public law, including human rights law, was created to prevent grave injustices of humanity, and later, serious harms to the environment. Human rights and environmental health are of global concern, and should be of national concern as well, especially if a nation is defending injustice with the banner of “national security.” Is this what makes a nation more secure... to deceive its citizens, to restrict international media and support? At one point in the Congress, President Khosla, in response to an unprecedented move to remove the

media from plenary during discussion on Gangjeong, stated that IUCN should discuss “substantive issues on substantive grounds, and not have the media amplify them.” Ultimately, the motion failed, but that does beg the larger question, what is the proper role of the media in national matters of international importance? The villagers continuously contend with state-controlled media, which makes it very difficult to share the story outside of the ROK, let alone within it. Is state-controlled media a national security interest, as well? Is that what protects citizens, keeping these “new imperialists” out?

At the same exact time the second Contact Group was scheduled, and supporters were outside the plenary waiting for their time to begin, President Khosla moved to pull the motion from the table, at the request of the IUCN Steering Committee. They claimed that new evidence had been presented that required the motion to be removed from a vote. At no time were the Gangjeong supporters aware of this new evidence, or able to counter it. It seemed IUCN had taken a note from the ROK on their definition of due process. During this time, IUCN Vice-President Javed Jabbar, who was also Chair of the first Contact Group (who was expected to be an unbiased representative), also publicly stated that he did not support the motion and it had the ability to hurt the Union. This same sentiment was shared by other leadership, that this motion could “harm the integrity of IUCN.” In a motion to protect all that IUCN was created for, in a motion that originally cited over 40 past IUCN resolutions, why would adopting such a resolution harm its integrity? Or has its integrity changed? As some concerned members stated, “It seems IUCN is in a value crisis.”

The call to remove the motion ultimately failed, and a new Chair was appointed for the second and later third Contact Groups. For the moment, the new imperialists had won – they had

defended due process, the true integrity of the Union, and most importantly, the chance for this story to continue to be told.

ONE THOUSAND BOWS, ONE THOUSAND REASONS FOR HOPE

“We do not feel alone anymore.” – Sung Hee Choi, peace activist at Gangjeong Village

Although the motion ultimately failed to pass, it, and the movement behind it, was considered a moral victory. As the motion was being discussed and voted upon, the villagers and their supporters were doing one thousand prayer bows outside of the Congress center.

The story was told, and it continues to be told here. The world conservation movement is in a new era where green has become popular, but at what cost, if any? Nation-states want to be known as green, corporations want to market that they are green... and yes, some, if not most, may be sincere. But this only puts more responsibility on those organizations able to color these states and companies.

The integrity of an organization can never really be sold, but rather it is given away. Value choices are made before ever taking money, from whom, and for what purpose, and with what result. What of organizational security? As with a state, if the principles of that organization are lost, what are they really defending? It is the responsibility of the leadership (or government) to stay true to its mission (or constitution and international laws), and it is the responsibility of its membership (citizenship) that there be accountability of that leadership. This article was not only about the very purpose of nation-states to protect the well-being of their citizens, all of their citizens, or of organizations that feel the strain of weak economies and diverse members, to still do what is right and what is just. But more importantly it was the story of a small indigenous village that is being destroyed – right now being destroyed – in the interests of making a more

secure nation, and the story of an organization who did not do everything in their capabilities to defend it, when by their very existence, by their very definition, they should have. And so we reach another underlying theme, a changing of definitions. What is green? What is security? What are concerned global citizens? What is an international union for nature conservation? Never again should a report be headlined, “Missing Democracy, Human Rights and Environment at the World Conservation Conference” (Gangjeong Village Association, Jeju Pan-Island Committee for Stop of Military Base and for Realization of Peace Island, National Network of Korean Civil Society for Opposing to the Naval Base in Jeju Island, 2012).

Destroying rights to secure rights is like an organization taking money to secure its future [when it is the money that jeopardizes its very future]. What principles are either securing? The principles that should guide our common future are those advanced by the Gangjeong villagers and their supporters: Mayor Kang, Sung-Hee Choi, Regina Pyon, Paco and Silver, Kristin Douglas, Imok Cha, Koochan Paik, Gayoon Baek, Br. DoHyun Park, Fr. Kim Sung-hwan, Fr. Chonguk Kim, Mr. Kim Min-Sou, Ms. Yune Pak, Dr. Katherine Muzik, Christine Ahn... you are abused, you are arrested, you shave your heads, you starve yourselves, you have sleepless, cold nights outside of the base, you tie yourselves with barbwire or beneath cars, all of you pray... you create art, you create song and dance, you laugh, you meet one another and marry, you build libraries, you promote peace, you take care of one another... each of you is a reason for hope, each of you is what makes our future more secure.