



A banner flaps in the wind at the Dakota Access Pipeline protest camp near Cannon Ball, North Dakota, on Jan. 24. | REUTERS

Japanese protesters demand mega-banks end funding for Dakota pipeline project

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Citizen's groups on Friday delivered a petition with more than 11,300 signatures to three of Japan's mega-banks to demand they halt funding for the Dakota Access Pipeline reinstated by U.S. President Donald Trump.

A group of concerned citizens started the online petition last December at Change.org. They are calling on Mizuho Bank, Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi UFJ, and the Sumitomo Mitsui Financial Group to withdraw their

funding for the Dakota Access Pipeline, saying the \$3.7 billion project threatens Lake Oahe, the indigenous Standing Rock Sioux Nation's only source of drinking water in North Dakota.

The three banks did not disclose the amount of money they've put up, but according to Food & Water Watch, a Washington-based nongovernmental organization, they have more than \$1.4 billion invested in the project.

"Banks are financing projects with our deposits without our knowledge of where the money goes," said Ian Shimizu, an organizer with 350.org Japan, another nongovernmental organization. "More people should know about it."

The petition said the three banks are violating their own human rights values.

All three have adopted the so-called Equator Principle that determines, assesses and manages environmental and social risk in project financing.

While citizens' groups assert the pipeline project breaches the principle, all three banks said they in general abide by the Equator Principle and finance projects with much consideration for the environment and human rights issues.

Following massive protests and campaigning, two of Norway's largest financial institutions last year withdrew their funding for the project due to human rights and environmental concerns.

The delivery of the petition in Tokyo came as Trump is upping efforts to undo the legacy of his predecessor, President Barack Obama.

Obama's team last December denied Energy Transfer Partners, the developer of the pipeline, the permit needed to complete construction of the pipeline. But Trump ordered the secretary of the army to advance construction as soon as possible after his swearing-in.

The pipeline is seen as an embodiment of Trump's "America First" policy. Energy Transfer Partners say it will carry 470,000 barrels of oil a day from the oil fields of western North Dakota to Illinois and create thousands of construction jobs and fuel the economy.

But members of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and environmental groups view the project as threatening the environment and their culture.

The route crosses their ancestral lands, and there is concern about environmental damage should it rupture near the Missouri River.

“It is a violation against the rights of indigenous people,” said Akemi Shimada, an Ainu woman, head of Greater Tokyo Ainu Community House Project, who was one of the people who helped deliver the petition. “Trump should understand the rights of indigenous people to live harmoniously with nature.”

There have been massive protests against construction near the site, and the United Nations last October started an investigation on potential human rights violations against Native American protesters by North Dakota law enforcement officials.

But on Monday a U.S. court judge denied a restraining order that would have suspended the construction, and North Dakota Gov. Doug Bergum Thursday ordered the protesters to evacuate their camp.

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/02/17/national/japanese-protesters-demand-mega-banks-end-funding-dakota-pipeline-project/#.WSZZ.8mkIUE>