

# Boosting Japanese military would be a “grave threat”

WASHINGTON – Boosting the military of Japan would be a “grave threat” to Asian Pacific countries, said a Japanese archbishop.

Archbishop Joseph Mitsuaki Takami of Nagasaki strongly criticized Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s upcoming referendum to revise Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, which is an obstacle to Japan’s remilitarization and military involvement overseas.

“Japan without Article 9 would be a serious threat to neighboring countries” because of Japan’s aggressive history before World War II, said Archbishop Takami.

If Japanese citizens vote in favor of the referendum May 3, Japan’s Constitution Day, the government would be permitted to maintain de jure military forces which could be deployed for combat.

Japan’s military would be the third largest in the world, behind the United States and Russia, said the archbishop.

However, Mr. Abe and supporters of the referendum argue that Japan should be able to protect itself from North Korea and China.

Archbishop Takami spoke March 12 at Georgetown University in Washington. Sister Shizue Hirota, a member of the Mercedarian Missionaries of Berriz and president of the Japanese bishops’ Commission for Social Concerns, briefly answered questions after the presentation, which was sponsored by the university’s department of theology, the Woodstock Theological Center and Pax Christi USA, the national branch of the international Catholic peace movement.

The archbishop and Sister Hirota also met with congressional leaders March 12-14 to discuss the referendum.

Article 9 was originally required by the United States after Japan’s surrender in

1945. It has since been embraced by the Japanese people, who remember the August 1945 atomic bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, said the archbishop, who noted that he survived in his mother's womb but lost relatives in the bombings.

The atomic bombs "taught us a great appreciation of nonviolence," he said. Japan must remember its history "not only as a victim, but also as an aggressor," said the archbishop.

The archbishop pointed out examples of how the Japanese military has been "strengthening coordination" slowly - with the support of the U.S. - since the mid-1900s.

"All these moves are unconstitutional," he said. Article 9 is supposed to be an obstacle, but "it has been conveniently ignored by U.S. and Japanese forces," said Archbishop Takami.

Archbishop Takami pointed to a 2000 report, called "The U.S. and Japan: Advancing Toward a Mature Partnership," by an American bipartisan study group of former government officials as an example of U.S. support of the increasingly interconnected U.S.-Japanese military.

The report argued that the relationship between Great Britain and the U.S. is a good model for the U.S.-Japanese alliance and that "Japan's prohibition against collective self-defense is a constraint on alliance cooperation. Lifting this prohibition would allow for closer and more efficient security cooperation."

The report said that this decision is one that only the Japanese can make, but that "Washington must make clear that it welcomes a Japan that is willing to make a greater contribution and to become a more equal alliance partner."

Japanese troops are stationed in Iraq for peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts. They are only allowed to fire under restricted circumstances, and Mr. Abe is subject to justification under Article 9 for the troop deployment.

Mr. Abe and Australian Prime Minister John Howard strengthened military ties March 13 by signing a security agreement to increase cooperation in counterterrorism and intelligence. Japanese troops would train alongside Australian

troops for peacekeeping and disaster-relief missions.

Meanwhile, Sister Hirota said after the presentation that 75 percent of the Japanese people do not want to revise Article 9.

However, she said, North Korea's October 2006 nuclear test has been "very sophisticatedly used to make people afraid." She called the government's moves "cultural manipulation."

"The media is also manipulated," she said.

U.S. lobbying "is welcomed by our government," she said. "That's the difficult thing."

Sister Hirota urged Americans to write to the Japanese prime minister and voice concerns over the dangers of a Japanese military buildup.