

Letter from Japan

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*The Secretary General of
the Japan Council against
A&H Bombs (Gensuikyo)
sent this letter, dated 18
March 2011, a week after
the massive tsunami struck
Japan's east coast.*

Following the massive earthquake that hit the eastern part of Japan and the subsequent tsunami disasters on 11 March 2011, the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant faces a critical situation. Among its six nuclear reactors, 1, 2 and 3 had their fuel rods damaged, partially melted, or suspected to be melting. At reactors 3 and 4, the water temperature of the spent fuel storage pools has risen so high that much of it has evaporated, so that fuel rods are exposed to the air. A critical situation continues. It is reported that the water temperature in the spent fuel storage pools at reactors 5 and 6 is also rising.

Faced with the danger of massive exposure to radiation, in common with the damage from the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and from nuclear testing around the world, voices of sympathy, concern and anxiety for the victims and the people in evacuation are reaching us from everywhere in Japan and overseas. As a movement working on the basis of the tragic experiences of Hiroshima and Nagasaki for the prevention of any more calamity and for a total ban on nuclear weapons, we are deeply concerned about the present crisis, and urge the Japanese Government to make an all-out effort to avert the worst situation of catastrophic exposure of the entire nation to radiation. We also call on the Japanese Government to make its best effort to mobilize the wisdom and actions of the people nationwide in rescuing the victims of the earthquake, tsunami and the nuclear accident.

Firstly, the most urgent and vital task is to prevent further meltdown of the nuclear fuel and to ensure cooling of the spent fuel, thus preventing massive dispersal of radiation

from the reactors. If the situation deteriorates to such a point that uranium and plutonium melt out of the fuel rods, massive amounts of radioactive substances will be released into the air. This is the worst-case scenario.

The Government has assigned the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, a body that was created to promote nuclear energy, as the responsible body to cope with the crisis. This assignment aggravates the situation. The Government must give top priority to securing the safety of citizens, and should not be driven by the interests of the electricity industry and other financial and economic circles, such as their demand to preserve the failed reactors. The Government should give the central role in coping with the crisis to the independent Nuclear Safety Commission of Japan, which has the role of 'cornerstone' of the nuclear safety administration.

Secondly, rescue efforts on behalf of the victims of the earthquake, tsunamis and nuclear power accident are equally urgent and vital. The death toll has exceeded 12,000 and another 15,000 people are still missing. More than 400,000 people are staying in emergency evacuation centres, suffering great anxiety. Evacuations of in-patients from hospitals have resulted in a succession of tragic deaths. To meet the challenges posed by such an enormous disaster, it is essential to call for, and rely on, the support of broad sections of the community, alongside the efforts of national and local government. We urge the government to provide all disaster-related information fully and quickly. It should also ensure that communications, traffic and transportation media are available to citizens in their rescue efforts on behalf of suffering people and their local councils.

Thirdly, the ongoing disaster at Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant once again shed light on the tremendous danger posed by continued dependence on nuclear power, especially in Japan, the most earthquake-prone country in the world. Gensuikyo has frequently pointed to the enormous risks involved in Japan's nuclear policy, which includes using plutonium fuel in nuclear power plants, resuming operation of the fast breeder-reactor (Monju), and operating the reprocessing plant at Rokkasho-mura.

We have urged an immediate halt to the new construction of nuclear power plants, and called for an all-out examination of existing ones. In the face of still-feared major aftershocks, we again urge the Government to conduct immediately comprehensive checks on all existing nuclear plants. Further, we urge the Government to prioritise the development and promotion of alternative energy resources.

An Appeal from the Mayor of Minamisoma

The Mayor of Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture, a city subject to a Japanese Government directive that its residents stay indoors to avoid radioactive fallout from a nuclear plant crippled by the March 11 earthquake and tsunami, has begun appealing to the world about the 'injustice' of such an instruction.

Speaking in an 11-minute, English-subtitled video, posted on YouTube on 24 March, Katsunobu Sakurai said the Government's directive has made life extremely difficult for local residents.

'Even volunteers and those delivering relief supplies have no choice but to enter (the city) at their own risk,' said a grim-looking Sakurai, wearing the same sort of protective clothing worn by workers in charge of disaster relief and other emergencies. 'Residents are being forced into starvation.'

The city of Minamisoma is located within a 20-30-kilometer radius of the stricken Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, which is leaking radioactive material into the air, soil and sea. While the Government has issued a directive for people who live within a 20-km radius of the plant to evacuate, those inside the ring have largely been left to themselves, many of them leaving on their own due to severe disruptions to their daily lives.

Kenichiro Nakata, a Minamisoma resident who made the video, said he wants the world to know that inhumane conditions exist in Japan. 'Residents affected by the disaster don't even know whether they should stay or evacuate,' he said.

In the video, Sakurai notes that his people have suffered extensive damage from both the tsunami triggered by the earthquake and the subsequent nuclear disaster.

Besides lacking information from the government and plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co., as well as manpower and supplies, he said, 'Many residents cannot secure any means of transportation' in the 20-30 km ring. Sakurai called for more assistance and co-operation, noting that few journalists have ventured into his city and that telephone interviews — the most common way of contacting residents — are inadequate for reporting their plight.

An evacuation directive has been imposed since the magnitude 9.0 quake and tsunami knocked out power supplies to the nuclear plant's cooling systems and led to massive leaks of radioactive materials, with a directive issued for those living in the ring to stay indoors. With criticism mounting over the directive for those living in the ring, the government began urging them on March 25 to evacuate voluntarily.

Tokyo, 1 April 2011, Kyodo
kyodonews.jp/news/2011/04/82483.html