



Fukushima's Quagmire

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Mr Sato is a member of Iitate Village Assembly in Fukushima prefecture, which is about 24 miles north-west of the nuclear disaster site.

He gave this address in Hiroshima on 4 August 2011, during the World Conference Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs.

Let me begin by expressing our deepest gratitude to you for the warm support you have given us in goods and money, as well as in providing places to stay for the victims of the earthquake and the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

The accident at Fukushima Daiichi is heading further into the quagmire, rather than coming under control. Right after it happened, about 120,000 people from Fukushima took refuge within or outside the prefecture. As of July 15 2011, this number has declined to 76,194, but the number of people who have fled from Fukushima prefecture has risen to 45,242, meaning 2.2 per cent of its population are forced to live elsewhere. One can only imagine the frustration and anxieties they live with every single day, having no idea about when they will be able to go back home. Those who continue to live in Fukushima, in places not designated as evacuation zones, are also deeply concerned: 'How many years can we live in such an environment where low levels of radiation continue to exist? Is it really true that there will be no ill-effects on our children?' No one has a clear-cut answer to these questions, and this is what concerns us most.

Administratively speaking, the village of Iitate, my hometown, became what it is today when it was merged with other neighbouring communities on 30 September 1956. Mountains and forests cover as much as 75 per cent of its 230 square-kilometre land area. It is a genuine farming community where our means of living are the production of rice, livestock, tobacco leaves, vegetables, flowers and

◀ *Dr Ishida of the Hiroshima Red Cross Hospital and A-Bomb Survivors' Hospital (photo: Malaya Fabros).*

ornamental plants. 30.4% of our 6,170 inhabitants are old people, over 65 years old. The average yearly temperature is 10 degrees Celsius and the mean annual rainfall is about 1,300 millimetres. We have a cold climate in which the cold and wet easterly/northeasterly winds drift down during the early summer days. This, coupled with the late frost that comes as late as mid-May, damages our crops. We don't have much snowfall in winter, but the temperature can fall as low as 15 degrees Celsius below zero.

In spite of these unfavourable conditions, our ancestors and we have taken much pains and made great efforts in building the community. Today, Iitate has been chosen as one of 'Japan's most beautiful villages'. This year, 2011, was to have seen a leap of progress with the building of more factories and making local specialties for sale.

On 12 March, hydrogen explosions occurred at the No.1 and No. 3 reactors of the Tokyo Electricity Power Company's (TEPCO) Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, followed later by fires at the No. 4 reactor, and partial destruction of the containment vessel of the No.2 reactor. These critical man-made disasters caused highly radioactive materials to fly in all directions and to spread over vast areas, including our village. All our villagers were forced to evacuate their homes, leaving everything behind including land, property, livelihoods and even hopes.

The need now is for the evacuees to prepare to return to the village and rebuild the infrastructure so that their health and safety will be ensured as well as the right to live. But the government, utility, prefectural and local administrations are too slow in carrying out measures in response to these needs. All this makes things even more difficult, along with the lack of credible information. For four months, since the start of the present disaster, the government and the utility have withheld important information. They have lied about what has happened, and even underestimated the present dangers. In the early stages, we accepted evacuees from Minami-soma City and Futaba Town. We assisted evacuees until March 18. It is regrettable that we supplied water and food contaminated with radioactive materials. On March 22, we learned from media reports that radioactive materials were detected in broccoli. Since then, radiation levels were announced every other day for milk, water and soil. Infants, pregnant women, children, young people and women were advised to leave the village voluntarily. Families were broken up, and people were forced to live in different evacuation centres.

The village authorities did not order all residents to leave their homes to fulfil their administrative responsibility. Instead, they requested the government to take special measures and carry out decontamination of

firms and long-term nursing homes, which the village wanted to keep until the government designates their areas as exclusion zones. Many villagers began to voice angrily their rejection of nuclear power plants in their village. They did not know what to do in the present situation. Despite growing uncertainty, village mayor Sugeno Norio submitted a proposal to the central government, saying that the village had no intention of becoming an anti-nuclear flag-bearer.

Eight business establishments and a long-term nursing home continue to operate in the village. More than 800 villagers, including a 370-member 'security team' working three shifts to protect the village and its assets, have returned to the village. This is what's happening in our village. Isn't this the way to turn the people into guinea pigs to study the effects of low-level radiation exposure? We simply want no more nuclear power plants anywhere, whether they are in Fukushima, Japan or elsewhere in the world.

Our village has hosted nuclear power plants in the name of 'national policy' by accepting what the government explained as 'the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes'. No one imagined that a level 7 nuclear disaster would wipe out towns and villages, and displace large numbers of people to unknown places, where they would be unable to foresee what would become of them. The accident exposed the brutal outcome of over-optimistic views about Fukushima and on the part of national governments, which have believed the 'safety myth'.

Another factor that delayed an evacuation order was the lack of sufficient radiation monitoring sites in the prefecture, which hosts ten nuclear power plants! Right up to the disaster, there were only 23 monitoring posts within 20 kilometres, and only one near the prefectural government building, all under the control of the Local Development and Promotion Bureau. Regarding the prompt distribution of accurate information, what TEPCO and the Ministry of Trade, Economy and Industry are doing has been contrary to that which is needed. They have withheld needed information. Their underestimation of the crisis appears to be intentional. Fukushima residents are sick and tired of the comments they continue to make on television. To date, they refuse to admit that the nuclear accident is man-made.

In areas that are not designated as exclusion zones, parents are desperate to protect their children from radiation exposure. They are not sure if the one millisievert per year safety limit is really appropriate for the protection of children's health. They are confused by mixed and various kinds of information they see on the internet. We must seek to use the power of

collective wisdom from around the world in order to save our children. To this end, we call for an authoritative independent body to be established.

The Fukushima Joint Centre for Post-disaster Reconstruction, which Fukushima Gensuikyo is working with, conducted an opinion survey on nuclear power plants. It shows 84.5 per cent of respondents favouring the decommissioning of all nuclear plants in Fukushima, and 79.3 per cent wanted TEPCO to compensate for the damage. One respondent said:

‘The Fukushima Prefectural Government shouldn’t allow TEPCO to take charge of disaster management at its power plant because it’s just like asking a robber to look after your house.’

Another respondent said,

‘Do you understand how painful it is to hear your child say he would die of cancer? We want safety to be restored in Fukushima!’

One more said:

‘We need absolutely safe energy sources in place at any cost.’

Outrage and demands spilled out of the respondents’ comments.

Following the nuclear disaster at Fukushima Daiichi, Italy and Germany decided to shut down their power plants. In Fukushima, the governor, Sato Yuhei, publicly reversed his position in the Fukushima Prefectural Assembly session of June 27. He said that Fukushima Prefecture should seek to build a community that does not depend on nuclear energy.

The Fukushima Prefectural Liaison Council for the Safety of Nuclear Power Plants, which consists of the prefecture’s democratic organizations, has, for 38 years, been active in pointing out the danger of nuclear power plants, but neither the Fukushima prefectural government nor TEPCO has listened. They should have realized the danger before we had to go through such ordeals. Living in the only country to have been attacked with nuclear weapons, we should also have realized the precariousness of so-called ‘atoms for peace’. To begin with, was it appropriate to regard what used to be weapons as safe? The fact is that we have no scientific method for the safe storage of spent fuels. Clearly, humankind cannot coexist with what is ‘nuclear’. I believe it is our duty to work for the swift development of renewable energy sources in order to leave a safe and sound world for our children. We must call for no more nuclear victims.