

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.

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kyodonews.jp/news/2011/04/82483.html