

To those who are working hard for renouncing nuclear energy:

A Message from Ruiko Muto

It has been eight years since the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant disaster on March 11, 2011. I would like to thank you all for your continuous attention and support. I am also grateful for your lasting efforts to abandon nuclear power plants all over the world. As the 3.11 anniversary is approaching, I am inevitably stirred by memories of the disaster and continue to realise that injustice and suffering caused by the accident have never gone away.

2018 was a significant year for me. In 2012, three former executives of the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) were brought to justice and prosecuted forcibly for their criminal responsibility for the accident. In 2018, as many as 35 court hearings took place and I was in the courtroom throughout these proceedings which revealed numerous facts previously hidden. It has now become clear that the governmental committee's estimate of the probability of a tsunami, triggered by a major earthquake off the coast of Fukushima Prefecture, had warranted precaution prior to 2011, leading some TEPCO employees to work on preventive measures after they calculated the height of a tsunami up to 15.7 meters. However, executives at that time, having received such information on various occasions, nonetheless failed to take measures and continued operating the power plant. These facts came out through various testimonies and documentation such as e-mails and minute books. The defendants repeated feckless explanations, saying "I neither saw nor heard them. I don't remember. I didn't have such an authority." At the end of last year, the prosecutors said in their closing argument "the defendants refused to accept their responsibility for the disaster and always tried to shift it onto others," adding "it was an unthinkable attitude for top executives in the nuclear industry" and as such "we find no extenuating circumstances." The prosecutors called for five years' imprisonment for all three defendants, which is the maximum charge for professional negligence resulting in death and injury. The verdict may be given some time this summer after the conclusion of the trial with the final argument by the defendants due on March 13, 2019. I wholeheartedly wish that a strict and fair verdict should be given, so that such a tragedy will never be repeated. I would be grateful if people all over the world would take interest in this case.

We are now facing new problems in Fukushima. Over 1 million tons of tritium-contaminated water are currently stocked on the premises of the wrecked power plant. While the chairman of Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) believes in the necessity to release it into the ocean, a lot of local residents have raised their voices against this idea at official public hearings, demanding the authority to keep storing it on the ground. The local fishing industry is also determined to resist the dumping. However, even after the discussion on this matter on December 28, 2018, organised by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, our views were not at all reflected.

Meanwhile, the NRA announced a removal plan of 2400 radiation monitoring posts in the Fukushima Prefecture except 12 municipalities in evacuation-designated areas. A citizens' group against this plan was formed, and at local briefings many people including mothers of young children objected to this plan. Around a third of municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture have asked the Japanese government in writing to keep the monitoring posts.

Although some verification programs attempting the reuse of contaminated soil have been blocked thanks to stark oppositions from the residents, similar attempts are going on

elsewhere. In Iitate Village, most of which is outside of 30km radius from Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, there is a plan to use contaminated soil for elevating farmlands.

Last year, the UN Special Rapporteur urged the Japanese government to lower the acceptable level of radiation dose for children and women of reproductive age from 20 mSv/year to 1mSv/year — the level before the accident—. Furthermore, he pointed out that the prefecture's decision of stopping public aid such as a free housing program was pressing the "voluntary" evacuees into returning home. Another scheme of housing subsidy by the local government since the termination of the previous scheme will also be withdrawn in March 2019, leaving no public support for the "voluntary" evacuees. In addition to this, the governor of Fukushima Prefecture announced that the provision of temporary housing for Namie, Tomioka, Katsurao and Iitate Villages will be over by the end of this year, despite the fact that some parts of the villages are still designated as difficult-to-return-to zones.

According to the report of a thyroid screening program for children 18 years or younger at the time of the accident, over 200 individuals have been found to have thyroid cancer (166) or suspected thyroid cancer (40). However, the Thyroid Examination Assessment Subcommittee made public last year that there were 11 more thyroid cancer cases not included in the official statistics. What is worse, Fukushima Prefecture says that they are not going to investigate any cases outside of the framework of the Fukushima Health Management Survey, although citizens' support groups found that some thyroid cancer patients had their operations carried out in other medical institutions than the Fukushima Medical University Hospital, the only hospital undertaking the official survey. The subcommittee is going to analyse the possible connection between the increase in thyroid cancer cases and the nuclear disaster, but it is impossible to deliver precise analysis without having the exact number of patients. Some subcommittee members even suggest reducing the scope of the health survey, arguing that it could lead to "over-diagnosis" or that a general survey in schools violates human rights, whereas other members are fiercely opposed to the idea, emphasising the importance of continuous observation and early treatment. In January, the Tokyo Shimbun newspaper reported that a case of an 11-year old girl with around 100mSv thyroid equivalent dose (the radiation dose locally absorbed by thyroid) had been reported at a meeting of the National Institute of Radiological Sciences in May 2011. The Japanese government has been claiming that "there was no child whose thyroid equivalent dose reached as high as 100mSv." Another example, a published academic paper in which the estimated lifetime dose for Date City residents was only one third of the correctly evaluated dose makes us all the more suspicious of widespread collusions to cover up the correlation of health damages with exposition to radiation.

Despite such a heavy reality, citizens and some media continue to courageously fight for a better society. Although you live far away from us, we greatly appreciate and are encouraged by your care and support. Let us unite for a world without nuclear facilities, where everyone can live safely and comfortably.

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(Translated by JAN UK)