

Statement: National Policies Corner Victims Six Years after the Fukushima Nuclear Disaster

On March 11, 2011, the Great Tohoku Earthquake led to the disastrous meltdowns in the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plants owned by Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO). Six years later, the accident remains unresolved and we continue to face the consequences of a prolonged and unprecedented nuclear disaster.

The consequences are complicated and diverse. Due to the wide spread radiation contamination, the lives of those who once lived with blessings of nature were lost and in many areas, dramatically altered. The countless consequences include: loss of livelihood and purposes of life, living in cramped temporary evacuation shelters, dividing families and communities, health risks and growing anxieties, bullying and prejudice in the evacuation destinations... and the list goes on.

In such a situation, national policy which encourages the evacuees to return to their home under the name of “reconstruction” corners victims of the nuclear disaster.

1. Discontinuation of Evacuation Housing for Evacuees Coming from outside of Official Evacuation Zones

The government denies health risks from radiation exposure and as such has issued evacuation orders to certain areas based on the radiation exposure limit of 20 mSv per year. Evacuees outside the specified evacuation zones were forced to evacuate without compensation. Due to the fact that their evacuation remains socially unrecognized, many evacuees suffer from lack of public understanding labeling them as “people who selfishly ran away” even in the evacuation destinations. Housing provisions based on the *Disaster Relief Act*, which can be said to be the only public support for these people, will be terminated at the end of March this year. Very few have been able to find a new residence for April and beyond.

There are local government bodies that extended the tenancy, created special blocks, provided rent assistance, etc. to public housing from a humanitarian standpoint, but there are inequalities in responses depending on the evacuation destination. For evacuees who have rented homes from private owners, their fates remain unknown but there have been cases in which management companies have enforced high hurdles and pressured them to move out. Despite the numerous compelling appeals of many evacuees, both the national and Fukushima prefectural government have not withdrawn the policy discontinuing evacuation housing stating that the matter has been “already decided”.

According to the *Nuclear Power Plant Disaster Children and Victims Support Act*, the government is supposed to provide the necessary assistance so that the victims have the choice between staying, evacuating, and returning home. They are also responsible for securing housing in the evacuation destination. Nonetheless, the Japanese government has failed to fulfill these responsibilities.

2. Evacuee Return Promotion Policies are not “Reconstruction”

Under the name of “acceleration of reconstruction”, the Japan government has lifted the evacuation order from previously specified evacuation zones one after another and has been promoting an evacuee return policy. Already, the evacuation order has been lifted in Tamura City Miyakoji District, Minami Soma Odaka District, Kawauchi Village, Naraha Town, and Katsurao Village (excluding areas where it is designated as ‘difficult-to-return zone’). In addition, the evacuation order will be lifted from Namie Town, Iitate Village, and Kawamata Town from March 31 and from April 1, the order will be also lifted from the evacuation order cancellation preparation zone and restricted residence zone of Tomioka Town.

However, the termination of the evacuation order is not a reflection of the evacuee’s views. As such, there are not many returnees in areas where the evacuation order has already been terminated.

At the briefing meetings held in various areas concerning the termination of the evacuation order, many evacuees have expressed their sentiments that “the termination is too premature” or “the evacuation order should not be lifted”. Meanwhile, there are elderly people who have lost their purposes of life and stay all day in their cramped temporary housing. It is true that there are many who feel that

another relocation is beyond their limit. This tells us that the system of long-term evacuation in response to the prolonged nuclear power plant disaster was not appropriately constructed.

According to surveys on intentions of evacuees on returning to their previous residents conducted by the Reconstruction Agency and related municipalities, many evacuees responded they will “not return” or “still cannot decide” whether to return. Those who responded that they plan “to return” are largely elderly households of 1 or 2 people which means the younger generation will not be returning. Even if the evacuation order is terminated, the areas will have many vacant homes with scattered elderly residents.

If we are to assume that “reconstruction” means to restore people’s original ways of living happily, the hasty return policy currently put underway by the government is far from “reconstruction”.

3. “Radiation Exposure” “Health Risk”

In current Fukushima, it is considered taboo to utter the words “radiation exposure” or “health risk” and it is publicized that feeling anxious about such things is even rather worse for health.

On the other hand, prefectural health surveys have revealed that there are 184 children under the age of 18 diagnosed with malignant or suspected case of thyroid cancer. Of those 184 cases, 145 of them have been confirmed as cancer after biopsy surgery.

“311 Thyroid Cancer Children’s Fund” which FoE Japan helped establishing, provides financial support to children suffering from thyroid cancer in fifteen of the eastern Japan prefectures. Even outside of Fukushima prefecture, there are many cases where lung metastasis and other diseases become rapidly severe, due to insufficient screening systems that delay discovery of the diseases.

Instead of denying the relationship between the incident and health problems, The government should take precautionary principle and take on its responsibility to establish an adequate medical or health system for people.

Reconstruction for people

Currently, a large amount of the government budget is allocated to reducing the volume of contaminated waste and constructing facilities for such. Among these projects, some seem to have serious environmental effects, or to have unclear purpose therefore needs to investigate if these projects are really needed. On the other hand, counter measures aiming to prevent radiation exposures are rarely conducted by the government, only some CSOs have recapitulation camps for children in Fukushima.

Victims and evacuees of the nuclear disaster are cornered by the policies that only reduce the number of evacuees on statistics and denial for the relationship between the radiation exposure and health problems done under the name of “reconstruction”. The government must not underestimate the loss caused by the nuclear disaster, make clear the responsibility, and take firm action for dignity of victims.