Three Years On: Japan’s Unending Nuclear Crisis

Mel Gurtov
Three years on, many obstacles still lie in the way of those who would see Japan turn to alternative, safer sources of energy.

Kay Kitazawa
Logistical problems continue to plague recovery efforts. Japan’s government to take a stronger hand in providing strategic leadership.

Ayumi
How one 18-year-old girl from Fukushima drew attention with a heartfelt plea to Japan’s decision-makers to abandon nuclear power.
A Letter from Fukushima By Ayumi

Ayumi, an 18-year-old girl from Fukushima, wrote this letter in Japanese to the Gwangju Jeonnam Action Campaign for a Nuclear-Free World, a South Korean anti-nuclear activist group, on the third anniversary of the Fukushima meltdown.

Only after the Fukushima nuclear power plant meltdown was I able to realize ...
— That nuclear power generation stands on the sacrifice of numberless people, and that it is a terrifying system for generating electricity that runs violently at random, because it is uncontrollable once an accident takes place.
— That those who have pursued nuclear power generation have known that it involves huge risks if an accident occurs, which is exactly why plants have never been built in urban areas.
— That the government, which is expected to protect our lives and security, is now ignoring the problems of people’s lives and health, and concentrating only on economy-first policies. In the aftermath of the accident, my life and my perspective on the world have completely changed. In hopes for avoiding radiation-ridden rice, vegetables, meat and other foods, we are trying to buy them from faraway places. We never drink tap water and always wear masks to avoid the contaminated air.
— That for the rest of my life, I will have to live as a “Fukushima person.” Wherever I go, wherever I run to avoid all the memories I had in Fukushima, the fact that I am exposed to radiation will never disappear. When will I become ill? And if I do become ill, would the government admit that it is because of radiation exposure? All my friends here in Fukushima are living with the fear of whether or not their future babies will be born healthy.
— That things are getting worse. The instances of childhood thyroid cancer, which is known to occur in one in a million people, has been found in 33 children in Fukushima, which has a population of only 22 million. And extraordinarily, the number is increasing year by year (according to the Fukushima Health Care Inspection and Review Committee on Feb. 7, 2014.)
— That nationwide attention on the Fukushima accident is fading away. While it is an obvious fact that the accident has yet to be brought under control, Prime Minister Abe has pushed for the 2020 Olympics to be held in Tokyo, announcing, “the water pollution is completely under control.” The truth about the radiation exposure issue will be concealed even more. With the whole country delighted to host the Olympic Games, decontamination and anti-radiation measures are being neglected in the name of economic growth and prosperity. Fukushima survivors are suffering every day, literally in the pains of a living hell.
— That life with radiation every day but without human dignity is the portrait of me now living in Fukushima. Such a tragedy should never be repeated. However, the Japanese government is preparing to restart the country’s nuclear power plants against our desperate wishes, and is promoting the export of nuclear power technology abroad. Despite the catastrophic disaster in Fukushima, a greedy and reckless few are trying to rule the world with this uncontrollable monster, reared on the sacrifice of the numberless weak.
— That the image of “safe and clean” nuclear power generation has been unmasked and has disappeared since the great earthquake of 2011, the ultimate power of nature. What we have lost from the accident is countless. We were forced to leave our farms, which have been inherited from generation to generation. Animals and plants, not able to save themselves from the calamity, were hopelessly irradiated. Hometowns where the minds of many people dwell and breathe have been destroyed. Warm houses are gone and beloved families scattered. Will my thyroid, bones, and all my organs, contaminated by radiation, ever recover? Those who have no idea how to turn things back to normal should never pursue nuclear power generation. It is an energy that sacrifices too many innocent people, from uranium mining to waste disposal.
— Let us stop now. We need to think sincerely. I wish never to see another victim.

A Korean translation of this letter was released on March 8, 2014. It was translated into English by Haeun Choi, a Global Asia Fellow at the East Asia Foundation.