

Inter-religious Conference on Nuclear Issues

Story-sharing 1, December 5th (PM)

Rev. Terumi Kataoka (Representative of Aizu Radioactivity Information Center, Minister of Wakamatsu-Sakaecho Church of United Church of Christ in Japan)

Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you very much for visiting our Aizu Radioactivity Information Center this morning during your field visit. This evening I would like to explain what Japanese government and Fukushima Prefecture did after the accident of Fukushima Atomic Power Plant, and what the present situation is, with special focus on the voices of people, especially of mothers, which are heard through the activities of Aizu Radioactivity Information Center.

Confused Residents of Fukushima Prefecture

For about 2 weeks from March 15th, 2011, I took refuge with my youngest son, my younger sister and 2 of her children, in the home of my younger brother-in-law in Suzuka City, Mie prefecture, which is located 450km apart from Aizu Wakamatsu. At the end of March, I came back to Aizuwakamatsu City and met the people who were living as if nothing happened, quite the opposite of people who were fearing radiation exposure. Many people of Fukushima Prefecture believed the safe-and-no-worries declarations issued by the Japanese government, in which they repeated that “there is no need for anxiety” and “there is no immediate effect on your health” since immediately after the accident of the nuclear power plant. I think that there were many people who clung to faint hope amid their confusion and fears, and therefore wanted to believe the assurances of scientists.

But mothers who feared radiation exposure of their children were in a different state of mind. They were made to believe a nuclear accident would never happen. Because they had no knowledge, they felt their fear instinctively. But they could not voice their fear, even if they felt it. If they did, they were told by their husbands, families and neighbors that “Politicians and scientists of stature say it’s safe. You are too nervous.” Many mothers questioned themselves; “Am I strange, or worrying too much?” They fought their own fears alone, and tried to put away their fears, deep into their hearts.

The person who widened the gulf between people who felt anxiety and those who felt safe was Professor Yamashita, a professor at Nagasaki University and an authority in the Thyroid Gland Society of Japan. Professor Yamashita was quickly called in to control confusion at Fukushima Prefectural offices and Fukushima Medical University, and was given the post of Prefectural Radiation Health Risk Management Advisor and Vice President of the University. Then he gathered his pupils and other scientists around him and gave lectures all over the prefecture. Telling people about his medical experience at Chernobyl, he spread his safe-and-no-worries campaign with such messages as, “Human beings are safe up to 100mSv of annual radiation exposure,” and “Radioactivity does not affect people who are laughing,” and “This it is a time of national emergency, so peoples must obey the state,” and so on.

Last May 5th, the Professor said to an audience, “Children in Fukushima are lucky. They

can measure high radioactivity themselves and learn about its effect. By overcoming this and awakening to atomic energy, great scientists might be born.”

At this I yelled, “We are not guinea pigs!”

One young mother, a member of Aizu Radioactivity Information Center, turned the radio on for earthquake information, and heard the lecture of Professor Yamashita. Now she says regretfully, “So I believed the Professor’s story and lined up with my children to receive water from a supply truck, because our water had stopped. It was raining and snowing that day. Now I understand that I exposed my children to radiation unnecessarily, and fear that they may one day fall ill with cancer. As a precaution I have bought cancer insurances for my children. I have kept the hairs and nails in which radioactive substances were accumulated.” About one month after the nuclear accident, she became doubtful about Professor Yamashita’s story and took refuge with her husband and 2 children in Niigata Prefecture for 3 months. Then they came to Aizuwakamatsu City. They live a double life now, paying rent in Aizuwakamatsu while they continue to pay off the loan on their home in Koriyama. Her husband’s daily commute to his office is over 1 hour. This story is not unusual. Children should be full of hope as they grow up, but parents in Fukushima are living with great fears and regrets.

□ People are Divided

When people living outside of official evacuation zones decided to evacuate from the high radiation in their town, because they felt anxiety about radiation exposure to their children, most of them left their homes quietly, without telling their neighbors and friends. If they talked about evacuation, they were called cowards, or told “you are lucky, because you had a place to evacuate to.” In this moment they feared that long-nurtured human relationships would be lost. When parents decided to change their children’s school, most told the class teachers, but their children would not tell their classmates. So, on many mornings, children would go to school to discover that another of their friends was gone.

Among the evacuees, there not a single person who feels glad that only their family was able to evacuate. This is the same among children. This is why it is so difficult to persuade children, especially in upper grades of elementary school, to evacuate.

And if all family members do not agree about evacuation, relationships between husbands and wives can get worse. There might be a husband who does not feel danger, and a wife who feels anxiety. There are many case where couples have considered divorce, or actually divorced. Children who were made to evacuate sometimes accuse their mothers, “You’ve taken me away from my friends and father and have made me feel lonely, all because you’re a scaredy-cat.” Mothers, who have given up everything to protect the lives of their children, are finding themselves isolated from their families.

Many mothers ask themselves if they are just being selfish or beginning a bad mother for causing such sadness for their children.

There are also people who decide to split up the family for safety. In these cases, the husband usually stays in the house because of his job, and a wife and children are evacuated to another prefecture. I know some large families, who used to live harmoniously with 3 or 4 generations under one roof, who have had to split up so the children could evacuate to the Kansai region. In some cases great grandfathers and mothers may not see their great-grandchildren again, because their children afraid to return to the high radiation zone the elderly cannot travel far. As you can see, invisible radioactivity not only affects our health, but also cuts our human relationship into pieces.

□Studies and Research for Who?

Professor Yamashita and scientists entered Fukushima Prefecture one after another and went around giving lectures. They also carried out health examinations and internal exposure tests of Fukushima Prefecture residents using the whole body counter. About 8000 youth under age 18 have received thyroid gland tests, and cysts and tubers have been discovered in around 40% of them. Despite these findings, they have judged that almost all of these cases do not require secondary tests. Not only this, they notified all doctors belonging to the national Thyroid Gland society of this decision and angered Fukushima residents by attempting to block anxious parents from seeking second opinions. On September 11th of this year, it was revealed that a child is fallen ill of thyroid cancer, but the Review Committee for the Fukushima Prefecture "Prefectural People's Health Management Survey" announced that this cancer was not caused by the accident of Fukushima Atomic Power Plant. However, at the beginning of October, 2 weeks after their announcement, it was learned that a secret meeting was held just before the announcement to ensure that all parties would hold to the story that cancer, cysts and nodal inflammation of thyroids were not related to the nuclear accident. Reacting to major protest, the Prefecture government started immediately to investigate whether the secret meeting took place, and soon reported that such a meeting did not happen, and that the Review Committee only met to prepare itself for smooth function. But we cannot believe this report. This is because, ever since the accident, we have repeatedly been angered and disappointed by late revelations that important facts were hidden from us. We see no sincerity in the attitude toward us of the Japanese Government, the Prefecture or Tokyo Electric. We have no confidence at all that the purpose of Professor Yamashita's tests and examinations is to protect our health. We feel that our bodies, and the data gained from them, are just objects of research. This is exactly the same as studies that were conducted by the Atomic Bomb

Casualty Commission after World War II, a large-scale epidemiological study in Hiroshima. All of the data that was gathered went back to the United States and was not used for medical treatment of the Hibakusha (A-bomb victims).

□The Current Situation in Fukushima Prefecture:

On December 16th, 2011, Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda declared that the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant Accident was concluded. This in spite of the fact that the situation inside either of the nuclear reactors was not known at all, and it was not known whether or not evacuated residents could return to their homes, and none of the radioactive substances had disappeared. Since this declaration was made, the mantra of Fukushima Prefecture has been, “Bonding: Revitalization: Decontamination: Compensation: Health Administration”. A great amount of national funds have been used for revitalization of Fukushima Prefecture: 500billion yen for decontamination work, 10 billion yen for the construction of a radiation medical center, 1.2billion yen for the gene testing. But we are feeling anger at this, too. In this budget there is absolutely no budget for “convalescence” programs to protect children from radiation exposure. Why will government not help un-evacuated children to get out of the prefecture occasionally, to areas with no radioactivity? This is because, if they funded convalescence programs, the Prefecture would be admitting that Fukushima is contaminated. The Prefecture would then have to pay compensation, more of the population will move away, prefectural tax revenues will fall, and the Prefecture will no longer be economically viable. The top priority is not the wellbeing of prefectural residents, but economic recovery.

Why is there need for a radiation medical center equipped to conduct the most advanced cancer treatments, if they have been telling us ever since the accident that it is safe and not to worry? If the accident had not occurred, would it have been acceptable to conduct gene testing, without any discussion of human rights and medical ethics? Why are all medical costs of children under 18 years old free? “There is no immediate health effects,” they say, but if the government expects cancer, leukemia and other disorders to rise eventually, then all of this makes sense. If this is the rationale, then why are children not allowed to convalesce, to protect them from illness? Why are they not conducting thyroid gland testing, blood testing, electro-cardiograms more speedily? Why is no national budget being given to these things? Each day we lift our voices to say; There can be no revitalization if we are not protecting children’s lives.

In June of this year, the national Diet passed the “Statute for the Protection and Support of Children and other Victims of the Tokyo Electric Power Company Nuclear Power Plant Disaster.” This is a law that guarantees the rights of nuclear disaster refugees, both those who have evacuated and those who have not. In mid-October, a

meeting was held in Koriyama City to explain the policy in concrete terms. As I was given an opportunity to make a proposal, I proposed that areas subject to the law be judged not only by airborne radiation doses, but also by soil radiation doses, and that routine examinations be given to children for thyroid gland testing, blood testing and electro-cardiograms. Precise policies will be decided in the Diet at the end of December. I pray sincerely that this law will be designed for victims.

□What Happens when a Nuclear Power Plant Accident Occurs?

What we, residents of Fukushima Prefecture, are anxious about is not only radiation exposure, but also the loss of collective memory about the accident. After Prime minister Noda declared “conclusion” of the nuclear accident, media coverage of the accident declined markedly. The accident started to be viewed by many as “already finished,” or even as if it never happened. What happens to our lives when a nuclear accident happens?

Ms. O, a refugee from Ōkuma machi, which is now a restricted area, intended to move into a new house on March 16th. She and her husband spent 2 years designing every detail of their home. They installed a wood stove and solar power, had a well for water. They were going to plant vegetables in 1 tan of land, about 1000m², then have children and grow old together in the beautiful nature and community of Ōkuma machi..Their new house was located 7.5km from Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. On 11th of March, she lived in an apartment 3km from Atomic Power Plant. She went outside at 8 p.m. to make a cell phone call, because she could not get a signal at home. That was the beginning of her refugee life, and also 35years of home loan payments. She has not gone back to her home, even when she is allowed to return temporarily, in consideration for her future children. She will never stay in her new home. However, other people who have been forced out of Ōkumamachi to live in other cities and towns, often out of prefecture, can come back to their house for short periods at designated times to retrieve necessary goods. Last year, when the first temporary return home, 45litre-bags were handed to the people. These were bags to put their important goods in. Please imagine their sadness, regrets and confusion as they tried to deciding which items are most important, then entering their old houses they had to leave so suddenly. They could not fit their important goods in only 45litre-bags.

Ms.T is from Minamisohma City, which is also in the restricted zone. She is not permitted to stay overnight in her house, but goes when she can in daytime, to keep her house in order. Although she expected it, she has been having trouble with small animals since this summer. Her house became the nest of rats, and carcasses of rats were scattered about. Even after extermination, the numbers of carcass did not decrease at all. And garbage trucks did not go around yet, so the numbers and bad smell

increased. Government has since lifted restrictions in her area and is now allowing people to return to their homes, but I wonder if government officers and politicians know about this dreadful situation. I think government officers and politicians should experience reality and truth for themselves.

Mothers who have chosen “voluntary evacuation” to protect their children’s life from high radiation zone, continue to ask with tears in their eyes, “Why can we not live in the houses we have? Why must our family members live apart from each other?” Their towns are in zones where government authorities say people can live, so they cannot receive subsidies from the Prefecture, national government, or Tokyo Electric, even if they live in the prefecture. So they cannot save money for the futures of their children and feel anxiety about the future, because they are paying double, for loans on their own homes and rent on their homes in Aizuwakamatsu.

So, what is the situation here in the Aizu area? Aizu people compare pains. They compare their own pains and anxieties against those of evacuees from the restriction zone, who have lost hope and home and work. Compared to them, we are not suffering, because we have our houses and jobs and live with our families. We tell ourselves that we have to bear, and that we cannot complain about our radioactivity here.

The prefecture has been largely divided into 3 groups of people. If people who were harmed most severely say, “We are suffering more than you,” this forces others to be silent. And then, when compensation payments are made to some, but not others, jealousies arise and divide people more.

Who is causing this division? It is the Japanese state. And what are its purposes? To divide those of us affected by the nuclear accident with conflicting information, unreasonable compensation systems and so on, so we will become tired and abandon hope, fall into thought paralysis and act like nothing happened. The same happened in the area where the Minamata diseases arose, and also in Okinawa where people are trembling under the many problems associated with American military bases. How seriously have we considered these issues as our own?

In July, I led a group of 47 children and adults on a convalescence programme to Hyogo Prefecture. As the children ran around outside for the first time in months, there was one child aged 3 who stood alone in the sand box. He looked down at the sand for quite a while, then raises his face asked his mother,

“Mother, can I touch the sand here?”

A sand box is where children learn to play, quarrel and reconcile with his friends; a place where one’s heart and body grow. But children who have been forbidden to touch or pick up sand, leaves and stones on the roadside think that a sand box might threaten his life.

One child aged 4 was surprised to see me drying laundry outside, when he visited to my

house. I asked him, "Where do you dry your laundry?" He answered me, "My mother dries laundry inside the house, because there are many bad medicines outside." After the nuclear accident, lives of children have change greatly. I am particularly worried about their decline of physical strength and changes of taste.

Children who do not play outside fall more easily and have shorter physical endurance. Mothers who want to protect their children from internal exposure are limiting food choices, so the taste experience of children is becoming less diverse. Children are also displaying various signs of trouble: Sudden nose bleeds, bags under their eyes that won't go away, persistent sores in the mouth, or diarrhea, and so on. No one can prove whether or not these are the effects of radioactivity. One thing I was told recently is, there has been a noticeable physical change among middle school students attending classes at a private juku, or cram school. A child comes to juku class with his shirt dyed red with nose bleed; a child must get up to go to the toilet many times during class; child who falls asleep during class, unable to concentrate on studies. Before the accident, there were none of these problems. It just so happens that children displaying these symptoms belong to school clubs like the baseball club, or soccer club, which practice outdoors in the sports field. Experts agree, no one clearly understands the effects of repeatedly taking radioactive substances into one's body.

□"Turning our eyes to what cannot be seen"

"We look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal." 2nd Corinthians 4:18

This is a passage that I have loved. This is the passage I wrote on the inside cover of the Bible I gave to my husband at our wedding. But this passage came to sound sarcastic to me after the nuclear accident, and I found it hard to turn my eyes to it. But I've changed my way of thinking. It might be wrong theologically, or Biblically, but I decided to include "radioactivity" in "invisible things." This is because I decided to NOT turn my eyes away, to NOT run away, and to NOT abandon hope in the face of this sad and severe reality. Our Lord asks us concrete questions about how we live our lives. The Lord asks us each day, "How do you intend to live? Upon what will you fasten your eyes?"

Sometimes we are challenged to make very difficult choices.

With God standing always at our side, I hope that we will be given the power to know and detect what is false, and with the Lord's abundant love, I pray that we can become people who turn our eyes toward the things that are truly important things.

In this troubled age, let us live the life that was given to us, fully and responsibly, to the very end. I believe this is what God requires of us.

