

No More Plutonium Production

Japanese NGO Joint Statement

Stop Plans for Reprocessing – Prevent Nuclear Weapons Proliferation

The Japanese Government is currently undergoing discussion regarding nuclear fuel cycle policy. Japanese nuclear energy policy is overall being reexamined since the TEPCO Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant accident of March 2011, and the issue of spent fuel is of extreme importance within this issue. Sufficient debate from perspectives including safety, transparency and cost is necessary. We take this opportunity to hereby express concerns over the relationship of plans for reprocessing of spent fuel and nuclear weapons.

Plutonium separated through the reprocessing of spent fuel is a potential ingredient for nuclear weapons. The atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki was a plutonium bomb. With current technology, it is said to be possible to build an atomic bomb with around 5 kilograms of plutonium. The fact that nuclear reactor grade plutonium can be used to create nuclear weapons is acknowledged internationally by experts.

Japan is already in possession of approximately 45 tonnes, an enormous amount of separated plutonium, both within Japan and outside. In addition, if operations begin at the reprocessing plant in Rokkasho Village, Aomori Prefecture, enough plutonium for a maximum of 1000 atomic bombs would be commercially produced annually.

Plans for the use of this plutonium are not in place. Not only are plans for fast-breeding nuclear reactions practically abandoned, as the Government is now proclaiming a shift away from dependency on nuclear power, expansion of plutonium plans is unthinkable. If this continues, Japan would go against the government's own fundamental policy and accumulate huge stocks of plutonium whose use and purpose cannot be explained. Although Japan maintains its three non nuclear principles and is in strict adherence of its obligations according to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), this could lead to suspicions of nuclear weapons development from neighbouring countries. Furthermore, the risk of theft of plutonium or attacks on facilities would increase.

Japan going forward with reprocessing also has the potential risk of adversely impacting the proliferation of nuclear weapons. If operations begin at the Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant, Japan will become the only non-nuclear weapon state fully producing plutonium. In response, other countries are likely to express their right to obtain the same technology as Japan. For example, voices calling for reprocessing technology are increasing in South Korea. This could potentially destroy the foundations of the Joint Declaration on Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula (1992), impeding the denuclearisation of Northeast Asia. Japan would thus cause confusion to global efforts calling on Iran not to develop nuclear weapons, and to strengthen the nonproliferation regime.

At the Nuclear Security Summit held in Seoul in March 2012, it was confirmed to strengthen controls of materials which can be used in nuclear weapons such as plutonium. On one hand, the Japanese Government is calling for the commencement of negotiations for a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty, a treaty to stop production of weapons-purpose fissile materials. And yet at the same time, Japan itself is moving to expand its production of plutonium whose use is unclear. This is a grave contradiction.

Japan, having experienced the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, has consistently appealed for the speedy abolition of nuclear weapons. It is therefore all the more important for Japan to immediately cease any policies which would reverse international efforts to this end. We call upon the Japanese Government to cease its plans for reprocessing of spent fuel, and to formulate plans for measures to deal with spent fuel based on sufficient consideration of safety, transparency and cost.

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*This statement will be delivered to relevant Japanese Government agencies including the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Environment and Industry, and the Atomic Energy Commission.
The involved NGOs are also planning follow-up discussions with the Japanese Government on this issue.*

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