

Submission to the UN Human Rights Council by Greenpeace Japan

30 March 2017

Annex B: Children's Rights

While the international conventions to which Japan is party also make clear that children have the right to access accurate information to make informed choices, the Japanese government instead opted to specifically target children with a misinformation campaign regarding the risks of radiation in the environment. Specifically, materials that have been provided – and even mandated school reading¹ – downplay the risks of radiation exposure such that it may provide a false sense of security, leading to greater radiation exposures. Further, activities are being organized for children that would make it appear that radiation is not something of much concern. This has resulted in avoidable exposures of this vulnerable population to Fukushima radiological contamination.

For example, National Road 6 – which runs along the coast past the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant – was identified for clean-up by the “Happy Road Network.” Middle and high school children who were members of beautification clubs were then mobilized to participate in cleaning up sections of the road in Fukushima prefecture.² Although children were not allowed in the most heavily contaminated sections of road, basic radiation protection measures were not taken. Few used gloves, and fewer still wore masks.

In an even more shocking example, in November 2016, 13 Fukushima High School students were sent on a school field trip to the crippled reactor site.³ They spent an hour touring the site, including near the number 1 reactor which had its cover removed at the time of the visit. Prior to this visit, TEPCO had not permitted anyone under the age of 18 to visit the reactor site, due to the prohibition under the Labor Standards Act on employing people under this age in areas with harmful radiation.

The students visiting the plant were guided by their teachers and a Tokyo University physics professor. This is a clear case where children, including young girls who are far more vulnerable to the effects of radiation, were encouraged and guided by adults in whom they trusted to take an unnecessary risk. They were thus unjustifiably exposed to excess human-made radiation, which is in breach of the justification and ALARA (As Low As Reasonably Achievable) principles, the internationally agreed basic radiation protection concepts. This is a definitive case wherein children's right to participation – based upon their ability to access accurate information – was deliberately violated by adults who were perceived as authority figures.

In addition, the government has relied on Whole Body Counters (WBC) to determine population doses. This is problematic for several reasons: it only measures gamma radiation (hence the effect of beta and alpha emitting particles is not assessed), the detection limit for ¹³⁴Cs and ¹³⁷Cs is usually only about 300 Bq/kg (meaning lower doses that may still impact human health are disregarded), and there are large uncertainties in evaluating the equivalent radiation dose based on the WBC measurements.⁴ As children are more vulnerable than adults, this may have greater implications for them.

This also means that the doses recorded are based upon lifestyle changes that violate children's human rights – namely the right to play – as children are often kept indoors by their caretakers to avoid radiation exposure. The government has been using the measurements taken by the WBC as justification for people living in or returning to contaminated areas. However, this then embeds this obstructed childhood into formal policy, wherein children cannot safely play outside and must avoid doing so in order to meet the levels measured by the WBC that form the basis for their being permitted to live there to begin with. Thus, Japan is ignoring its obligation to form policies based upon what is in the best interest of the child, and instead has chosen to create policies that are in direct violation of children's internationally recognized human rights – the right to health, survival, and development – which include the right to play.

¹ Grover, A. (2 May 2013). “Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, Anand Grover. Addendum. Mission to Japan (15 - 26 November 2012).” *Human Rights Council. United Nations*. Twenty-third Session. Agenda Item 3. Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development. http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session23/A-HRC-23-41-Add3_en.pdf

² McInerny, P. (7 July 2016). “Grappling with Nuclear Catastrophe in Japan.” *UCLA International Institute: Terasaki Center for Japanese Studies*. <http://www.international.ucla.edu/japan/article/165856>

³ High school takes students to see Fukushima nuclear reactor decommissioning.” (19 November 2016). *The Mainichi*. <http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161119/p2a/00m/0na/008000c>

⁴ Physicians for Social Responsibility, et al., (18 October 2013). “Annotated Critique of United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR) Fukushima Report to the UN General Assembly.” <http://www.psr.org/assets/pdfs/critique-of-unscear-fukushima.pdf>