



Rise Together for Women in East Japan Disaster

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Re: The “Public Life” in the Temporary Special Measures - Japan

Dear Members of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

We, members of the *Rise Together for Women in East Japan Disaster*, wish to express our respect and gratitude to the members of CEDAW.

On the afternoon of March 11, 2011, a massive earthquake with a magnitude of 9 hit the northeastern (Tohoku) region of Japan, which is commonly referred to as the *Great East Japan Earthquake*. The massive earthquake, the subsequent devastating tsunami and the nuclear accidents have caused unprecedented damages.

We established a network of women’s organizations, *Rise Together for Women in East Japan Disaster*, in May 2011, aimed at protecting and promoting the rights of vulnerable people, especially women, with consideration to the diversity of people who have been affected by the *Great East Japan Earthquake*.

Japan has been frequently affected by massive disasters, such as tropical storms (typhoons), huge earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions. Despite the loss of many lives and repeated destructions and devastations, people in Japan have recovered and rebuilt each time. However, this recent massive disaster is characterized by the extremely wide area of damage, stretching 500 kilometers from north to south and 200 kilometers from east to west on the Pacific coast, as well as the widespread and ongoing effect of radiation from the nuclear accidents. Not only have traces of radioactive materials been found in soil, water, and food, but also in human bodies. Even children’s urine and breast milk have been found to be contaminated by radiation. Many people in Japan are in the midst of fear and anxiety with no prospect of resolution in sight.

More than 20,000 people have been killed or missing in this unprecedented disaster. Initially there were more than 2,000 evacuation centers and more than 370,000 evacuees. Many of them now have moved to temporary housing units, thanks to tenacious and dedicated efforts by the national government, local municipalities, the private sectors including non-profit organizations (NPOs), not to mention the self-help efforts of the those who have been affected by the disaster themselves. As of July 19 2011 , there are approximately 24,000 individuals residing at evacuation centers.

Many evacuation centers are public facilities, such as public schools or community centers. They are equipped to handle and support evacuees only for a few days but not for months on end. On March 16, 2011, the Gender Equality Bureau of the Cabinet Office issued a written notice requesting that the management of evacuation centers take into consideration specific needs of women. Subsequently, it issued additional notices requesting that evacuation center management make effort to protect the safety of women and children. However, the extent to which these requests have been followed remains unknown.. Women who are engaged in relief efforts, female journalists, and research conducted by human rights organizations have revealed various violations of the rights of women at the evacuation centers, including the following:

- Some evacuation centers, such as gymnasiums (of public schools), provided no partition boards. Even if there were partitions, their height is not enough to provide privacy.
- Initially, at many evacuation centers, there was no room/private space for women to change clothes or nursing rooms.
- Restrooms were located in inconvenient and unsafe places.
- There was no place for women to wash their clothes or to hang them (especially underwear away from a public view).
- In cases where evacuees prepared meals, women were assigned to the role of cooking, which added to the stress and exhaustion on their part.

Moreover, few women have taken part in managing evacuation centers. There were some evacuation centers where a male leader decided that partition boards were not necessary because an evacuation center is considered to be “one big family” and partition boards would break up the solidarity among the residents. Some male leaders would view certain women’s needs, such as requesting a space for mothers with infants, as too demanding. Moreover, there were some evacuation centers where male leaders refused to receive the Cabinet Office’s written requests [concerning women’s needs] and/or refused to hand out flyers informing of telephone counseling for women. Although there were some centers where male leaders gradually responded to requests from women, in most of the cases women had been forced to keep quiet because they had been told that everyone was in a difficult situation.

The Japanese national government formulated the *Third Basic Plan for Gender Equality* at the end of 2010 and began the effort toward the target of increasing the proportion of women in leadership positions to at least 30% by 2020. However, to the disappointment of many people in Japan, only one woman was appointed to the 15-member *Reconstruction Design Council*. The *Reconstruction Act* and the Proposal by the *Reconstruction Design Council* state that diverse opinions of women, children, people with disabilities, and foreign nationals must be reflected adequately. The *Basic Plan for Reconstruction* will be formulated at the end of July, it is not clear how the participation of women, people with disabilities, foreign nationals, and sexual minorities such as LGBT will be ensured.

We are earnestly appealing to the government to ensure the participation of women and the inclusion of

the diversity of people in decision making in the reconstruction planning of the national government and disaster-affected local municipalities. We are also earnestly appealing to other local municipalities (not directly affected by the disaster) that their disaster prevention plans include similar provisions promoting women's participation and inclusion of diverse perspectives. The *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015* adopted at the United Nations World Conference on Disaster Reduction in 2005 (Kobe, Hyogo, Japan) states "gender perspectives should be integrated into all disaster risk management policies, plans and decision-making processes, including those related to risk assessment, early warning, information management, and education and training." This was reaffirmed at the twenty-third special session of the United Nations General Assembly, *Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-First Century*. We are calling on the Japanese government to comply with this.

We respectfully appeal to the members of CEDAW to include the following points in the recommendations to the Japanese government.

1. The Japanese government and local municipalities should formulate guidelines for the management of evacuation centers aimed at upholding the human rights of women and other vulnerable groups of people in and after disaster. Consider and adopt international standards on protecting the rights of those affected by the disaster, such as those specified in the documents issued by the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC). In order to implement these guidelines effectively, the government shall take the necessary measures, such as developing an ordinance and establishing coalition with private relief/assistance organizations.
2. Integrate gender perspectives stated in the *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015* into disaster prevention plans of the national government and local municipalities.
3. Create a mechanism to ensure that women represent at least 30% at various decision-making bodies in the formulation and implementation of reconstruction plans by the national government and local municipalities.
4. Include in the reconstruction plans provisions that guarantee human rights of all people, regardless of gender, abilities, nationality, age, and sexual orientations.
5. Guarantee the human rights at evacuation centers, temporary housings, and governmentally-subsidized or -leased residences for those affected by the disaster. Ensure that those who are forced to occupy vulnerable positions in society, such as women, those with disabilities, and elderly, can participate in the formulation of plans and the design and management of these facilities.
6. To assist in the future disaster prevention and reconstruction planning, collect and analyze information on the damage and recovery of the *Great East Japan Earthquake* by gender, and present

gender-specific statistics. (Note: Enhancement of gender-specific statistics is included in the *Basic Plan for Gender Equality*).

7. Oblige local public agencies and other agencies (e.g., those that hold a governmental contract to implement reconstruction plans) that 50% of employment opportunities to be created shall be designed for or applicable to women.
8. In order to create a society free of violence against women and other forms of violence, the government shall support, financially and otherwise, not only counseling programs but also a broad range of prevention and intervention programs operated by private organizations.
9. As radioactive materials have been widely spread, it is predicted that exposure of all forms will affect the health of individuals. In addition to the serious impact on infants, potential grave health consequences extend to unborn children and future generations to come, which would discourage an increasing number of women from having children. Moreover, discrimination against people who live in the contaminated area is on the rise. Undoubtedly, these conditions will have serious negative impact on women's reproductive health, as well as decisions and opportunities concerning marriage and reproduction. Unfortunately, the government does not provide accurate information, and radiation exposure continues. Accurate information about levels of radioactive materials (e.g., in food, environment) must be made available; also critically needed are efforts to minimize and eliminate radiation exposure, including ensuring evacuation of children and infants, as well as pregnant woman. Moreover, sufficient compensation must be made to all forms of damage, including health problems, loss of employment, and displacement. Monitoring and documenting the long-term health consequences of radiation exposure is indispensable. More research is urgently needed.
The Japanese government shall establish a specialized research unit to conduct research on the long-term impact of radioactivity on an ongoing basis. The Japanese government shall also provide training and employment opportunities for female researchers who engage in this type of research. Needless to say, ensuring discrimination-free environment is critically important for productive research activities.

Respectfully submitted by

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