

Muto Ruiko and the Movement of Fukushima Residents to Pursue Criminal Charges against Tepco Executives and Government Officials 武藤類子と、東京電力役員・政府当局者を刑事告訴する福島県民の運動

Tomomi Yamaguchi, Muto Ruiko

Muto Ruiko and the Movement of Fukushima Residents to Pursue Criminal Charges against Tepco Executives and Government Officials

Tomomi YAMAGUCHI and Muto Ruiko

Translation by Norma Field

Muto Ruiko's speech in Japanese

Summary

Muto Ruiko is a long-time antinuclear activist based in Fukushima. She is also one of 1,324 Fukushima residents who filed a criminal complaint in June 2012 pressing charges against Tepco executives and government officials.

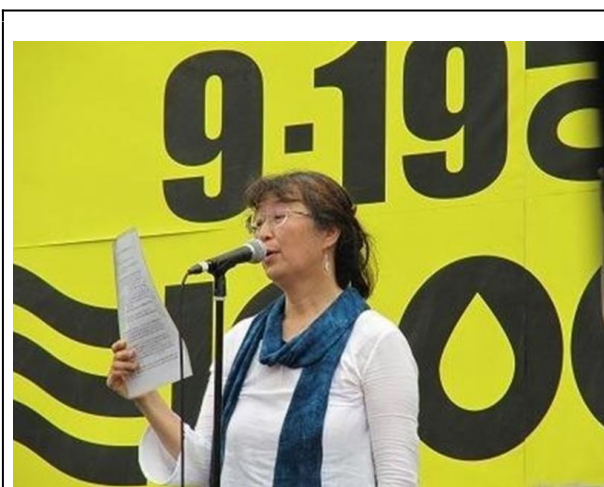
This article introduces Muto's activism on nuclear energy, her life before and after the Fukushima Dai'ichi disaster, and her recent effort to mobilize citizens for the criminal complaint. An English translation of Muto's speech at the University of Chicago on May 5, 2012, follows.

Keywords

Muto Ruiko, Fukushima, Criminal Complaint, Nuclear power plant, Energy policy, Community divisions, Tepco, Women, Nature and Environment

Introduction by Tomomi YAMAGUCHI

On September 19, 2011, Muto Ruiko traveled from Fukushima to Tokyo to speak at the Goodbye Nuclear Plants (Sayonara genpatsu) rally in Meiji Park. Her delivery, quiet yet confident, conveyed a deep sense of sorrow, anger, and power. "One by one, each of us citizens is demanding that the state and Tepco acknowledge their responsibility. And we are raising our voices to say, 'No more nuclear reactors!' We have become ogres of Tohoku, quietly burning with fury." (Muto 2012: v; translation modified)¹ The voice of a person who had committed her life to antinuclear activism since Chernobyl, and whose own livelihood was destroyed by the catastrophe, had a powerful impact on the audience of 60,000 gathered in the park in Japan's largest antinuclear power rally. Posted on the internet, the video traveled far and wide, generating a ripple effect.



Muto delivering her speech at the

Goodbye Nuclear Plants Rally. (Source)

While engaging in multiple antinuclear actions—organizing gatherings and participating in sit-ins, and giving speeches around the country—Muto’s most recent commitment is to a movement seeking to file criminal charges against the officials of Tepco and the government. She is one of 1,324 Fukushima residents (including some who have evacuated) who filed a criminal complaint with the Fukushima Public Prosecutors office on June 11, 2012, demanding that charges be brought against thirty-three Tepco executives and government officials. Muto played a central role in organizing this movement and is the leader of the group of complainants.

Muto Ruiko’s speech on May 5 at the [Atomic Age II: Fukushima Symposium at the University of Chicago](#) was delivered in the midst of efforts to meet the goal of securing 1,000 Fukushima complainants. By way of introduction to her speech, I will give the background to Muto’s activism on nuclear energy and her effort to mobilize citizens for the criminal complaint. I will also introduce her personal life before and after the Fukushima Dai’ichi accident, which in itself has profound political meaning.

Muto Ruiko and Her Antinuclear Activism

Muto Ruiko was born in 1953. She currently resides in Tamura-cho, Fukushima Prefecture, about 45 kilometers (28 miles) from the Daiichi plant. Having worked as a print artisan and special education teacher, she was running her own woodland café.

Since the Chernobyl disaster of 1986 Muto has been involved in antinuclear activism. That year, her sister, who grew up in an era when nuclear weapons were being tested throughout the Pacific, was diagnosed with leukemia. Muto writes in her book, *From Fukushima To You* (Otsuki shoten, 2011), that her sister’s

suffering gave her added motivation to work on nuclear issues. She subsequently organized and participated in actions in Fukushima, Rakkasho² and numerous other sites. As she said in Chicago, she is especially drawn to women-centered, non-violent actions against nuclear energy.

In November of 2010, Muto, with fellow activists, launched a project called [“Hairo Action: 40 Years of Fukushima Nuclear Power Plants.”](#) The project designated March 26, 2011 to March 26, 2012 as the “Action Year for Nuclear Decommissioning.” The goal was to disseminate information through events, the internet, and printed materials to work toward ending Japan’s reliance on nuclear energy. Part of the project involved examining the kind of society that could emerge after decommissioning. The starting date of March 26 marked the fortieth anniversary of the Reactor Number One of Fukushima Dai’ichi Nuclear Power Plant. That is to say, the Tohoku Earthquake and tsunami, and the Fukushima Dai’ichi Power Plant disaster occurred just before the Action Year was to begin. Since then, while struggling with a sense of having been “too late” as well as with the everyday challenges of having lost her means of livelihood, Muto has devoted much of her time to securing the human rights and health of local residents and evacuees. As she put it in her speech at the Goodbye Nuclear Power rally,

We, the people of Fukushima, want to share our suffering, responsibility and hope, and to support each other as we move forward with our lives, whether we have left our hometowns or have decided to live on in Fukushima. Please join with us. Please take note of the actions that we are undertaking: negotiations with the government, courtroom struggles to support evacuation, organizing

evacuation and respite care, decontamination, measuring radiation levels, and learning about nuclear reactors and radioactivity. And we will go anywhere to tell people about Fukushima. ... Please help us. Please don't forget Fukushima. (Muto 2012: v; translation modified)

As Muto writes in her book, emphasizes in her Chicago talk, and told me multiple times in conversation, she sees power and hope in women's action and solidarity.³ It is a conviction she has kept from the start of her engagement in the antinuclear movement, whether focused on Chernobyl, Rokkasho, or Fukushima. Recent examples are the sit-in described in her Chicago talk, "[No More Nuclear Power Plants: Sit-in by 100 Women from Fukushima](#)," staged in front of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry in October 2011 or "[The Women's Group for Breaking with Nuclear Power](#)."

Muto's faith in women and the style of movement that she has pursued seem to be deeply influenced by the course of the feminist movement since the 1970s, especially that of women's liberation, even though she herself did not participate directly. Her stance on leadership within activism – that it is better to have leadership shared among participants rather than identifying a single leader – the "hiraba" (level field) ideal – is also reminiscent of Beheiren (Japan Peace-for-Vietnam Citizens' Alliance).⁴

Some might find Muto's trust in women's strengths and their special bonds essentialist. Neither in her claims nor in her activism, however, does she focus on women's roles as mothers and wives. There is no question that she cares about the extremely difficult situations confronting Fukushima mothers since the Fukushima Dai'ichi accident, but in her statements and activities, she is careful to

honor the diverse situations and needs of women.⁵

There is another dimension to Muto's sensitivity that should be underscored. Not only has she herself been a special education teacher, but she has a long and close friendship with Asaka Yuho, a disability as well as antinuclear activist. In Chicago, Muto emphasized the impact that this friendship has had on her. In her Chicago talk she referred to the fear of parents of children with disabilities—especially single mothers, who bear some of the heaviest burdens—that radiation would bring further division and discrimination. As Asaka Yuho warns, the antinuclear movement itself risks fostering prejudice and discrimination by circulating photographic and other images of disabled people as a warning of the consequences of radiation exposure.⁶ Muto's longtime concern for people with disabilities has a concrete link to her current activities. When she was a special education teacher, she worked with parents to launch "The Carrot House" so that students would have a place to work after graduation. This enterprise, which included vegetable and poultry farming and recycling used oils for biofuel production, was hard hit by the 3.11 disaster. As it looks to develop new kinds of work, Muto continues to deliver eggs as she has for twelve years. Along with the eggs, she disseminates information about the criminal complaint and collects the statements of customers wishing to sign on.

Ongoing Issues in Fukushima: The "Safety Campaign," Decontamination and Division

Muto repeatedly emphasizes the challenge of "division" in her discussion of ongoing problems for Fukushima residents. To begin with, the siting of nuclear power plants often causes deep community divisions. (Yamaguchi 2011) In Fukushima, a major disaster, and the responses of the government and Tepco worsened already existing divisions and

created new ones. From among many issues that Muto addressed in her talk, I will focus on the “safety campaign” and decontamination. A major source of division lies in the fact that people have not known what information to trust, a situation exacerbated by the “safety campaign” promoted by the Fukushima Prefectural Government, the Japan Atomic Energy Agency, and other institutions. Fukushima Prefecture has actively promoted a “safety campaign,” symbolized by the hiring of Yamashita Shunichi as radiation risk management adviser. Yamashita’s credibility rests on from his long-time association with the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences at Nagasaki University. Following his appointment, he has made numerous public appearances emphasizing the negligible health effects from the disaster and conversely, the seriousness of psychological risks—i.e., radiophobia.⁷ The Japan Atomic Energy Agency also has been holding “Gathering[s] to Answer Questions on Radiation” for teachers and parents of pre-schoolers and primary and secondary school students since July 2011. These continue to this day.⁸ [Powerpoint slides](#) used at JAEA gatherings make clear that the sessions are designed to encourage teachers and parents not to worry. All of these occasions have functioned to disseminate a distorted message about the “safety” of radiation exposure. NPO Human Rights Now issued a report on its field-based investigation in November 2011 in the cities of Fukushima and Koriyama that harshly criticized this “safety campaign” as further isolating and dividing Fukushima residents, even augmenting their stress levels by discouraging them from sharing their anxiety and worries about radiation.⁹

Muto points out that the government’s do-nothing stance has subjected people to further division and difficulties. What the government has promoted—decontamination and transfer of debris—is deeply problematic. The Human Rights Now report reveals that the national government assigns most of the

decontamination work to municipal governments outside of the evacuation zone. Due to a labor shortage, municipalities are relying on local residents and out-of-town volunteers, all amateurs, to perform the decontamination. In Koriyama city, citizens were encouraged by the municipal government to volunteer for the decontamination effort, and there have been cases of unwilling young women and even children being forced to participate. (Human Rights Now 2011) Moreover, as the *Asahi Shimbun* reported in January 2012, it is the large construction companies that are getting the big contracts with municipal governments to do the decontamination, making it difficult for local companies to compete.¹⁰

There is an even more basic issue: the questionable effectiveness of decontamination, commonly taking the form of power-hosing hard surfaces (roads, roofs, walls) or removing surface soil. Even Reconstruction Minister Hirano Tatsuo told the Mayors of Namie Town and Nihonmatsu City, municipalities whose residents have all evacuated, that lengthening the time of street-washing had only a limited effect.¹¹ In the meanwhile, contaminated debris is being transported around the country for incineration and burial, with the central government making acceptance of the debris an issue of patriotic solidarity sweetened with financial incentives.¹² As a recent Asia-Pacific Journal Feature article suggests, the incineration and disposal of radioactive debris, the combined result of the tsunami and nuclear disaster, is causing community divisions outside of Tohoku in such relatively uncontaminated areas as Kitakyushu. (Asia Pacific Journal Feature 2012) “Decontamination” (*josen*) and debris removal (although tellingly, the phrase commonly used is “debris acceptance,” or *gareki ukeire*) look more like the transfer of radioactive soil or waste from one place to another, or, in the case of the combined process of incineration and burial, from the land to the skies and back

again. These procedures are extremely lucrative for some. How would the money spent on decontamination compare with what it would cost the government to transfer citizens, especially children, to safer places? What if the government tried to deal with the political and financial costs of dealing with Tohoku debris in Tohoku, so as to preserve safe places elsewhere?

Filing a Criminal Complaint against Tepco Executives and Government Officials

Muto Ruiko is the leader of the Fukushima residents' group that filed a complaint demanding that criminal charges be brought against the leaders of Tepco and the relevant governmental agencies in the Fukushima Public Prosecutors office on June 11, 2012. The executive secretary of the group, Sato Kazuyoshi, an assemblyman from Iwaki City, stated at a press conference on June 11 that the people of Fukushima were resolved not "to cry themselves to sleep": they want those in relevant leadership positions to be held criminally responsible. He continued, "I believe that this day is the outcome of the deep anger and sorrow stored in the hearts of Fukushima citizens, of the varied emotions accumulating in each of us over the past year during which our livelihood has been destroyed. I am convinced that today we are taking the first step toward our recovery."

This criminal complaint action, which asks the Prosecutors Office to undertake an investigation in order to bring criminal charges, should not be confused with a civil trial demanding compensation from Tepco and the government. *The Washington Post* reports that victims of the Fukushima Dai'ichi accident have filed about 20 lawsuits against Tepco so far.¹³ The number of civil suits is far fewer than the numbers brought in similar cases in the U.S., such as the several hundred suits filed against BP for its Gulf oil spill. *The Washington Post* suggests as reasons the lack of provision

for class-action suits in the Japanese judicial systems as well as the existence of a special nuclear accident law that limits liability to the nuclear plant operator, and which also prevents individuals from being held liable. Civil, as opposed to criminal cases, may be much more burdensome for the plaintiffs, the time involved even longer and therefore more daunting for plaintiffs and their supporters.¹⁴ Yet, there have been attempts to file civil cases, and Muto Ruiko is involved in them as well. For example, Tepco shareholders filed a large-scale suit against the company on March 5, 2012. Forty two shareholders, including Muto Ruiko and Sato Kazuyoshi of the criminal complaint group, joined in a suit against former and current Tepco executives; the lead attorney representing the case is Kawai Hiroyuki, who also represents the Fukushima criminal complaint group. The plaintiffs jointly ask for a record 5.5 trillion yen in compensation, claiming that the accident was caused by the negligence of Tepco executives.¹⁵ This may be the largest civil damage suit ever filed in Japan. Kito Masaki, one of the plaintiffs, who is also an attorney in the case, writes that since this is a lawsuit brought by the shareholders on behalf of the company against the accused who allegedly damaged the company, all compensation, if admitted by the court, will be paid to Tepco as a company, and not to the plaintiffs. According to Kito, the plaintiffs hope that Tepco will use the money to compensate victims.¹⁶ Clearly, Muto, Sato and several others have been engaged in multiple court actions, both civil and criminal, in order to press Tepco's liability for the Fukushima Dai'ichi accident.

There have been previous attempts by citizens to pursue the criminal responsibility of Tepco and government leaders. For example, The People's Tribunal on Nuclear Power was held on February 25, 2012, in which seven victims from Fukushima, including Muto Ruiko, offered testimony.¹⁷ Such "people's tribunals" serve as important occasions for giving a dignified

hearing to victims ignored in official channels and for gathering information and creating a record when the state is unwilling to do so. By their nature, however, they cannot directly provide redress. Writer Hirose Takashi and journalist Akashi Shojiro brought a criminal complaint to the Tokyo Public Prosecutors Office on July 15, 2011.¹⁸ The Fukushima group sees significance in the fact that the complainants in the Fukushima complaint are ordinary Fukushima citizens and more than 1,000 of them, rather than a few individuals. They also emphasize the importance of their decision to file their complaint with the Fukushima Public Prosecutors Office, and not Tokyo, noting that the prosecutors in Fukushima are fellow victims of the nuclear disaster. As the group declared on March 16, when it officially started to gather people to be party to the complaint:

We have decided to file our complaint with the Fukushima Public Prosecutors Office. This is because we believe it is the public prosecutors of Fukushima, who are forced to endure radiation exposure while they work in contaminated conditions, who, as parents and victims themselves, bear the burdens of a harsh, inescapable reality, who ought to confront the reality of this accident most seriously. (From “[We Shall Seek Responsibility for the Fukushima Nuclear Accident! Declaration to Submit Complaint](#),” March 16, 2012)



Photos from the day of filing the criminal complaint ([Source](#))

The organizers of this action officially started to call for people to join them as co-complainants on March 16, holding multiple meetings to explain the nature of this procedure. When Muto visited Chicago in early May, she was in the middle of trying to persuade 1,000 residents to join. The number at the closing of the first round of applications on June 3 was 1,324 people, far more than she thought possible in the beginning. All were living in Fukushima at the time of the Dai'ichi accident, although their current residences extend from Hokkaido to Okinawa to foreign countries. They range in age from octogenarians to kindergarteners.

The group plans to file a second round later this year, this time inviting non-Fukushima residents to join. Kawai Hiroyuki, one of the attorneys representing the case, said at the press conference that he would like to get 3,000, or even 10,000 or 100,000 people, to join

this complaint. He believes that a surge in public opinion is key to moving the prosecutors to indict.

The complaint names 33 people: from Tepco including CEO Katsumata Tsunehisa and 14 other executives; from the Nuclear Safety Commission, Chairman Madarame Haruki and five others; from the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, Terasaka Nobuaki and two others; from the Atomic Energy Commission, Chairman Kondo Shunsuke; leading bureaucrats of the Ministry of Education and Science; and three radiation risk management advisors appointed by the Governor of Fukushima, including Yamashita Shunichi; and Kinugasa Yoshihiro, an academic who has served on many governmental committees on nuclear energy, earthquake and tsunami.

The complaint asks the prosecutors to press criminal charges against these officials for damaging the lives, health and property of Fukushima residents and plant workers. It points out that Tepco and the government failed to take appropriate measures to prevent the accident, despite knowledge that the reactors were being operated in earthquake-prone Japan. It further states that even though experts had pointed out the risk of a tsunami at the Fukushima Dai'ichi Nuclear Power Plant, Tepco and the government had ignored the warnings. Yasuda Yukio, another attorney representing the plaintiffs, emphasized that the "nuclear village," consisting of Tepco, the central government, and scholars who promoted nuclear power, such as those serving on the Nuclear Safety Commission, the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, and the Atomic Energy Commission, were especially responsible.¹⁹ Data predicting the spread of radiation from SPEEDI (System for Prediction of Environmental Emergency Dose Information) was not released promptly. Officials repeatedly described the situation as "safe," resulting in the delayed evacuation of residents, further exposing them to the radioactive plume.²⁰

Outside experts such as Yamashita Shunichi appeared suddenly before Fukushima residents to declare that they were safe. Attorney Yasuda asserted that given that more than 1,000 Fukushima residents had filed a criminal complaint against such "experts," they should no longer have the authority to study Fukushima residents' health.²¹

The complaint does not pursue the responsibility of politicians such as then Prime Minister Kan Naoto or former Cabinet Secretary Edano Yukio. Attorney Kawai Hiroyuki explained that these were excluded in order to avoid blurring the focus of the complaint with controversy over politicians' roles. Instead, they had chosen to concentrate on "the ones who were clearly bad," Kawai told a June 11 press conference.

According to the legal team, whether low dose internal radiation exposure is recognized as causing bodily harm will be a key issue. Kawai notes, however, that there were many injuries in addition to low-dose exposure. He includes Tepco workers who died at the accident site, residents who died while evacuating, and suicides among the victims of Tepco's actions. In addition to individual Tepco officers, Tepco as a corporate entity is accused of having violated pollution laws in disseminating substances harmful to health.

Kawai estimates that it will be at least a year before the results of the criminal complaint are in. First of all, the prosecutors must decide whether to accept the complaint formally. They will weigh the reports of the parliamentary Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant Accident Investigation Committee due at the end of June, the government Investigation and Verification Committee due at the end of July, and Tepco's own report released on June 20.²² They may also conduct some investigations themselves before deciding whether to accept the complaint. Only then will they begin deliberations as to whether to prosecute.

To date, no public office has raised the issue of criminal responsibility on the part of the government or Tepco. The government investigation committee even stated at the outset that it would not consider individual responsibility. This complaint, according to attorney Yasuda, is meant to demonstrate that the accident was not “beyond the scope of expectation” and therefore could have been prevented.

During the press conference held after the filing on June 11, Muto Ruiko read the following statement issued by the Fukushima Complainants:

The Fukushima Complainants for Criminal Prosecution of the Nuclear Accident

Group Statement

June 11, 2012

Today we 1,324 residents of Fukushima Prefecture filed a complaint with the Fukushima Public Prosecutors Office, demanding that it press charges of criminal responsibility for the Fukushima nuclear accident.

We who have been robbed of our daily life, we whose human rights have been trampled upon by the accident—we have pooled our strength and raised our voices in anger.

To take the first step toward seeking prosecution required a great deal of courage on our part.

To ask that criminal charges be brought against other human beings has meant that we had to examine our own way of life.

We believe, however, that this process has profound significance.

- We are challenging a society that fails to value all who live in it, in which sacrifice is always being imposed on some members;

- We are coming together again, even expanding our ties after being divided and torn asunder by the accident;

- We who were hurt and lost in despair are reclaiming our strength and dignity.

We believe that this is the way to fulfill our responsibility towards children and young people.

Standing together with those who cannot raise their voices and with other living things, it is each of us individuals who will change the world.

Refusing to be divided, recognizing the power of our unity, unflinching, we will continue to pursue responsibility for the accident.

The Fukushima Complainants for Criminal Prosecution of the Nuclear Accident

The Statement’s message of recovering connections and building solidarity among Fukushima residents addresses the situation in which provision or denial of government compensation, availability or lack of means for evacuation, belief or skepticism about the “safety campaign” have all created bitter rifts within the community.²³

Philosopher Takahashi Tetsuya claims that nuclear power plants constitute a “sacrificial system.” (Takahashi 2012a) The Statement, while declaring that Fukushima residents were

forced to sacrifice themselves, also engages in self-reflection: “To ask that criminal charges be brought against other human beings has meant that we had to examine our own way of life.”

While in Chicago, Muto told me that this sort of action is a new style of activism for her. Up to now, she has mainly been involved in non-violent, alternative, woman-centered antinuclear activism. Recourse to official authority – the court – is new for her, and she experiences some uneasiness or at any rate, is feeling the differences: women’s alternative action vs. male-dominant legal action, a movement without leaders vs. one with a clearly designated leader. Despite such reservations, in the briefing session after the complaint was filed, Muto said,

The story of every single person willing to meet with me told me just what a difficult life had been imposed on these people, deprived of routine, forced to change everything from the ground up, robbed of their human rights, subjected to pain, indignation, and sorrow. We somehow have to make this complaint bear fruit. Every page of the submitted statements reads like a piercing cry from the heart. I tell myself, we can’t let these feelings go to waste. Until responsibility is properly acknowledged, there can be no recovery in any genuine sense in Fukushima.

People’s testimonies were similarly crucial in the case of the 15-woman lawsuit against the dispatch of Japanese Self-Defense Forces to Iraq filed by attorney Nakajima Michiko. In this case, the invocation of their own histories and experiences by women of different generations was key to supporting the claim that people had a constitutional “right to live in peace.”

(Yamaguchi and Field 2007) The criminal complaint lodged by Fukushima residents shows a similar valorization of the sharing of lived experience by people in their own words.

As Takahashi Tetsuya argues, the nuclear power plant disaster was a serious human rights violation for which responsibility must be pursued. (Takahashi 2012b) That process could also be key to Fukushima residents’ recovering their voices. Muto also mentioned that people of Aizu, the region of Fukushima furthest removed from the power plant, used to tell her that they were not victims of the accident, but rather of “rumor damage.”²⁴ Yet through conversation with Muto and others, some Aizu people began to recognize themselves as actual victims of the disaster and not simply of rumor, and began to express themselves as such in their own words. This, too, is an important step to overcoming division.

Muto’s Life Before and After the Fukushima Catastrophe

An indispensable part of Muto Ruiko’s talk at the Atomic Age II symposium was the description accompanied by slide show of her everyday life before the Fukushima Dai’ichi catastrophe. The details of her normal life had a deep impact upon the audience by helping them to visualize what had been lost.

In 2003, when she was about to turn 50, Muto resigned her teaching position and used her retirement pay to build a home and small café (Kirara, “shining”), in wooded hills across from a river. After Chernobyl, the antinuclear energy movement in Japan had been invigorated, but despite many serious accidents, nuclear power plants continued to be built, and people started to lose interest in the anti-nuclear movement. Encouraged by the former but despairing over the latter, Muto began to re-examine the way she was living her own life, especially with respect to how she used energy. She decided that she wanted to live in a way free of the many kinds of discrimination and the sacrifice

of precious lives required by the promoters of consumption. (Muto 2012: 51-52) The way she prepared for her new life “in the acorn forest” reflects this resolution. When she was 42, she began by carving out a hillside, digging out tree roots, moving soil, creating a level space, and building a hut. (See slides 20-29 [here](#))



Café Kirara, with solar panels (Source: Muto Ruiko's Presentation Slides for Atomic Age II: Fukushima)

After the Fukushima Dai'ichi catastrophe, however, she had no choice but to close her café. All the meaningful aspects of her life, in which antinuclear messages were deeply embedded, abruptly and completely vanished—although, given the distinctive invisibility of radiation, the material elements appeared unchanged. The slides she showed in Chicago as part of her [talk](#) showed the many things she had lost and could never recover.

When the Fukushima Dai'ichi accident occurred, she evacuated first to Aizu and then to Yamagata Prefecture with her elderly mother and dog. After a month, however, her mother wanted to go home. Muto was torn, for she had heard stories about other seniors, who, once evacuated, started to show symptoms of dementia and other health problems, and some who had even died as a result. She made the

difficult decision to return.

Not only the challenges of everyday life, but antinuclear activism, especially the criminal complaint movement, have kept Muto extremely busy. While walking in Cook County Forest Preserve to visit the site where the Chicago Pile, the world's first nuclear reactor created as part of the Manhattan Project, lies buried, she told me that her everyday life was no longer fun in the way it had been, so sometimes she felt as if she had lost the purpose of her life. Now, she spends a great deal of time each day in front of a computer screen or on the cell phone. Even though she was involved in antinuclear activism before the Fukushima Dai'ichi disaster, she had still been able to enjoy her life at the café surrounded by nature. This precious side of her life is gone.



A butterfly alights on a flower painted on the Kirara doorway (Source)

She has not, however, given up hope. When I asked her to sign her book, *For You From Fukushima*, for me, she wrote, “To Tomomi:

Let's create a new world together – Ruiko” and drew a little flower.

Muto Ruiko

5 May 2012, Chicago

(Translated by Norma Field)

More than one year has passed since the nuclear disaster that accompanied the earthquake and tsunami. At the time, I was running a small café in the mountains about forty-five kilometers from the Fukushima reactors. The disaster transformed my life. I would like to share with you some of the things that happened when the accident occurred.

On March 11, following the assault of the earthquake and the tsunami, there was a radio announcement stating that control rods had been inserted and the reactors had shut down. But that evening, news came that all power for cooling the reactors had been lost. I had some knowledge about the likely consequences of such a situation, and feeling the urgency, I went around the neighborhood, encouraging friends to evacuate. We ourselves got in our car to leave. At this point there had been no instructions from the government. That night, those within three kilometers of the plant began to evacuate. The next day, there was an explosion at Reactor Number One, and the evacuation zone was extended to twenty kilometers. There were some victims of the tsunami who were still alive, but rescue squads had no choice but to evacuate and were therefore unable to save these people. Livestock and pets—many living things—were left behind in the evacuation zone. Many elderly people died on the road. Seniors and people with disabilities faced severe difficulties in the course of the evacuation itself as well as in the shelters.



Muto Ruiko speaks, Norma Field translates, at Atomic Age II: Fukushima Symposium on May 5, 2012 at the University of Chicago (Photo by Tomomi Yamaguchi)

In the meanwhile, what was the government of Japan up to? It was not telling citizens about the information transmitted by SPEEDI or about the reactor meltdowns. In order to minimize the impact of the disaster, it embarked on a “safety campaign”—i.e., a campaign to reassure citizens that all was under control. Beginning with those areas registering the highest levels and extending to every corner of Fukushima Prefecture, people with the title of radiation risk management advisers went around saying, “Everything’s all right. You don’t need to worry.” Furthermore, the government raised the annual permissible levels of radiation exposure for humans and also raised the levels allowable for food.²⁵

This is what happened to citizens as a consequence:

- There was virtually no distribution of potassium iodide.²⁶
- People ended up fleeing to areas with higher levels of radiation.
- They stayed outdoors to clean up debris from

the earthquake

- They took their children with them to stand in long lines to wait for water delivery trucks and to use public telephones.

- Outdoor afterschool activities resumed quickly.²⁷

People did not know what information they could trust, and this contributed to their being divided one from the other:

- If a parent worried about water quality sent a child to school with a water bottle, that child would be told to drink tap water, like all the others.

- A middle-schooler sobbed that she did not want to escape to a safe place by herself. What would become of her friends?

- Many families have been driven to leading separate lives, the fathers, saddled with mortgages and tied to jobs, staying behind in Fukushima, and the mothers and children gone to other prefectures.

- In some towns, huge indoor play areas have been constructed, equipped with jungle gyms, swing sets, and sandboxes. The children seem happy enough as they play, but no sunlight or refreshing breeze or birdsong can reach them.

- Strange monitoring posts dot the landscape of towns and villages. They indicate the levels of atmospheric radiation from moment to moment.



Radiation Monitoring Post (Minami-Soma, Fukushima) (Source)

And, with the passage of one year, the government has committed vast sums to decontamination, as if that were the only available means of lowering radiation exposure. Local governments, excepting those of areas where the Fukushima Daiichi Plant is sited, have begun to call for the return of residents who have evacuated:

- There is no support whatsoever for the right to evacuate voluntarily or to travel for “respite care.”²⁸

As for decontamination, the major construction companies have a virtual monopoly on contracts. Those who do the actual work, all the while exposed to radiation, are those same people who lost their houses or jobs because of the disaster. Or else, they are residents engaged in decontaminating their own districts. The effectiveness of such measures is doubtful. The slogan “Don’t give up [*ganbare*], Fukushima!” serves as a rallying cry for recovery. Although I understand the attachment we all have for the places where we grew up, the cry rings hollow in my ears.

• In one municipality, regulations limiting outdoor activities in schools have been lifted as of April 2012.²⁹

• Plans are being made for outdoor marathons and whistle-drum parades for even young children.

• Middle-schoolers from other prefectures have come as volunteers to clear up debris in the coastal areas.

• The state's safety campaign is adopting various guises to penetrate small gatherings or meetings for people interested in cancer prevention.³⁰

• There have been cases of dealers falsifying the origin of ingredients for school lunches.³¹

• The government has been exerting tacit pressure on supermarkets and retailers who have established their own safety standards, arguing that needlessly strict standards will cause confusion.³²

The government's do-nothing stance has caused people to be subjected to further discrimination and division:

• Single mothers of children with disabilities, who face special obstacles in trying to evacuate or to travel for "respite care," feel guilty about continuing to expose their children to radiation.

• People who are concerned about radiation and plead the need for evacuation and protection are said to "worry too much."

• The lines demarcating evacuation or compensation zones have served to turn people against one another.

• People are worried about their children's health. They feel the need for every possible form of protection. At the same time, they, and the parents of children with disabilities, are increasingly fearful of further division and

discrimination brought on by radiation.

• Projected shortfalls of electricity are used to proclaim the need for reactor restarts; reactors are to be exported in the name of economic growth.



During March and April of 2012, there were frequent tremors; everyone is fearful about Reactor No. 4, where spent fuel rods are held in exposed pools after explosions compromised the structure.

Tossed this way and that, hurt and exhausted, people eventually abandon their wariness of radiation. They stop up their ears: we have no choice but to go on living here. We don't want to hear anything more.

Like radiation itself, the divisions among people penetrate every aspect of life. Toward the end of 2011, the government issued a statement declaring that the nuclear accident was under control. The media reported likewise. But for the victims, not a single thing about the disaster has been resolved.

That is the nature of a nuclear disaster.

It was twenty-six years ago, when the Chernobyl disaster occurred, that I learned for the first time about the dangers of nuclear power.

Nuclear power is a form of electricity generation that involves the exposure of workers at every stage, beginning with uranium mining and extending to waste disposal. Uranium mining leads to the exposure of Native Americans; the depleted uranium produced as a byproduct of uranium enrichment becomes a weapon that continues to harm the health of Iraqi and Afghan children. The routine operation and inspection of nuclear power plants inevitably involves worker exposure. Once there is an accident, as in Chernobyl and Fukushima, ordinary citizens are exposed to devastating amounts of radiation.

Even before the current disaster, I was beset by feelings of despair about the atomic age—about all the radioactive substances scattered around the earth by nuclear tests and reactor accidents, about nuclear wastes that remain dangerous for tens of thousands of years. Might this not be something that humans should never have touched? Wasn't this disaster, which implicates all forms of life, the consequence of human arrogance? What are we to do about the radioactive substances that have been scattered about, the rubble and sludge they have mingled with, the contaminated earth? It is a painful thing to have to impose this burden on young people.

After the Chernobyl disaster, I started a

movement within Fukushima Prefecture to oppose nuclear power. I have organized various kinds of lectures, presented demands and negotiated with Tepco, held petition campaigns, called for referenda, and issued newsletters. Direct, nonviolent action is what I have felt best suited for. I have never been particularly adept at speaking in front of others or pursuing the technical or social aspects of nuclear power, but appealing directly, putting myself on the line, feels right. At the time of the serious accident at Reactor No. 3 of the Fukushima Daiichi Plant that began with damage to the reactor recirculation pump in January 6, 1989, I organized a "Women's Relay Hunger Strike." In 1992, I started a "Camp for Women Who Proclaim We Don't Need a Nuclear Fuel Plant" at Rokkasho Village in Aomori Prefecture. It was at the time when uranium hexafluoride, an ingredient in reactor fuel, was to be transported to a uranium enrichment plant that was part of the nuclear fuel cycle facility at Rokkasho. Women gathered from all over Japan to try to stop this first shipment of radioactive materials to Rokkasho. We set up tents along the truck route and camped out for a month. On the day of the delivery, signaling with songs, one, maybe two women at a time would leave the group, find a spot that wasn't heavily guarded, and sit down on the road. We were driven out time and again, but we did manage to stop the trucks for fifty minutes.



Muto among other women in front of

METI for the sit-in (Source)

After the current disaster, we held an action called “Sit-in by 100 Fukushima Women Who Say We Don’t Need Nuclear Power” in front of the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry in Tokyo. Many people were participating in a sit-in for the first time in their lives. More than 2000 women came from all over Japan. We have been negotiating with Tepco, held a “We Don’t Need Nuclear Power Gathering of Life/Earth” at the one-year anniversary, and maintained a relay hunger strike to oppose restarting nuclear power plants. Today, May 5th, all 54 reactors in Japan have ceased operations pending regular inspection and maintenance. In other words, we are at nuclear zero. We are going to encircle METI as we dance an old folk dance of Fukushima called the “Kansho dance.” (I believe they are dancing it at this very moment.)

My focus on action by women does not stem from a desire to exclude men. While it is true that women have historically been subject to tremendous discrimination and oppression, in the dog-eat-dog, cutthroat world of present-day society in which economic interests have primacy, it could be men on the frontlines who are the more oppressed. In this sense, I think that women might have a different sort of reserve power. They’re willing to act on impulse and use their intuitions. They’re supple and good at enduring patiently. They like to be comfy, and they know how to enjoy themselves. Isn’t it possible, in the way they do things—having faith that it will all work out somehow—that there’s a key to a different kind of society from what we have today? This is what I said to the women on the morning of the sit-in:

Welcome, brave women! Thank you, each and every one who has come from far and wide, using your own time and energy and money. The boundless love and clear-headed thinking of women, together with the power of

nonviolence, will create a new world! Let’s sit, talk, and sing together!



Women in front of METI, holding the banner, “Women Choose Life! We do not Choose Nuclear Power” (Source)

The citizens of Fukushima are working on various actions all the time. Together with supporters from around the country, they are advancing plans for evacuating children and young people or arranging for respite cures. They are developing pathways for securing safe food and opening centers where citizens can bring in food to be measured for levels of radionuclide contamination. We are active in making recommendations for legislation to support victims.

In March, we launched an organization to seek the prosecution of Tepco and pertinent nuclear regulatory agencies. We are busy seeking a membership of 1000 by June.³³ I believe it is important for those who have been victimized to stand up and plead their cases in their own words. This is also a process for knitting together the feelings of those who have been divided, for healing the injuries suffered by each, and for recovering our strength and dignity.

Japan, in the course of making economic

growth its greatest priority, developed an unprotesting citizenry suited to become docile workers and consumers. It learned how to contain citizen anger. Society, schools, and the media all worked to ensure that no thinking would take place. We need to become conscious that we let ourselves get placed on this track. Now is the time when citizens have to recover their self-confidence and their pride. It's important for each of us to think with our own heads and to act within our capabilities, for each of us in fact has wonderful powers.

Now, I would like to share with you a little of the life I led, close to nature, before the nuclear disaster.

In the course of my antinuclear activism, I found myself often beset by despair and powerlessness over nuclear proliferation. It was at such a moment when I turned my gaze toward my own way of life. The electricity that we turn on so casually: when I realized that its generation entailed various forms of discrimination and the sacrifice of many lives, I thought I wanted to do as much as possible to put myself at the polar opposite of such a structure. I began to clear part of a mountainside and to embark on a life of self-sufficiency as much as possible.³⁴



"From an Acorn Forest: Life before March 11"

Photo from Muto Ruiko's Powerpoint

Presentation, composed by Muto, Shimada Kei and Aiko Kojima.

For the entire powerpoint slides with English explanations, see [Sliderocket](#) and [PDF](#).

I should say that I never thought of this life focused on energy conservation as hard. It wasn't about deprivation. There's pleasure in using our heads and exercising our ingenuity. It feels good to try to be in harmony with nature. Isn't it possible, that in exchange for convenience, we've been robbed of such joys?

Because of the nuclear disaster, however, this life, modest but sustained by careful use of the earth's energy, nourished by nature's bounty, and full of the pleasure of exercising ingenuity, will never come back. It will take a long, long time—perhaps 300 years—for the atmosphere to recover.

We need to reflect deeply on the nuclear weapons and power plants present in the world today. And we need to rethink our consumption and energy usage. Let us consider what constitutes abundance, what sort of values will make each of us truly happy, and initiate the actions necessary for realizing these values.

The nuclear disaster of Fukushima has brought on the worst situation imaginable, but today, I am able to meet all of you gathered here. This is also a chance for citizens to join hands, support each other, and help create a new world.

Let us walk together.

Tomomi Yamaguchi is an assistant professor of Anthropology at Montana State University. Her co-authored book in Japanese (with Ogiue Chiki and Saito Masami), *Social Movements at a Crossroads: Feminism's "lost years" vs. grassroots conservatism*, is forthcoming in September 2012. Her current research involves nationalism, racism and xenophobia in

contemporary Japan, particularly on the “Conservatives in Action” movement.

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¹ Muto’s speech on the antinuclear

demonstration that attracted 60,000 citizens can be found [here](#) (translation modified), and also on Youtube with English subtitles [here](#).

² For Rokkasho, reprocessing, and spent fuel, see documentarians Kamanaka Hitomi and Tsuchimoto Noriaki in Kamanaka, Tsuchimoto and Field (2007) and Williamson (2012).

³ David Slater (2011) has noted that women have been a powerful presence in post 3.11 antinuclear movements.

⁴ See Tanaka (2007) on Beheiren and its founder, Oda Makoto.

⁵ Matsumoto Mari states that the term “mother” was over-represented in post-Chernobyl antinuclear activism in Japan, on the premise that the main motivation for women to be involved in the antinuclear movement had to do with their perspective as mothers. Although some feminists are critical, Matsumoto argues that posing demands such as “save the children” or “protect mothers” in post March 11 Japan may be functioning as a way to protest the state and the nuclear industry, given the “safety campaign” and the visible failure of government to protect mothers and children. (Matsumoto 2011)

⁶ See Asaka Yuho’s blog entry [here](#).

⁷ “People are suffering from radiophobia,” *Der Spiegel*, August 19, 2011.

⁸ See [this](#) for the JAEA’s schedule for Q&A sessions during the current fiscal year.

⁹ See [here](#) for the report.

¹⁰ *Asahi Shimbun*, January 31, 2012.

¹¹ *47 News*, June 17, 2012.

¹² See [this](#) for the percentage of local governments accepting debris in map form.

¹³ For example, Watanabe Mikio of Kawamata Town of Fukushima Prefecture, about 40km northwest of the Dai’ichi plant, filed a civil suit against Tepco. Watanabe had to evacuate, and his wife committed suicide during their temporary visit to their house. He has demanded 90.4 million yen (\$1.13 million) for his wife’s death on May 18. See *The Washington Post*, June 25, 2012, for the Watanabe lawsuit. The same article also appears in *The Japan Times*, June 26, 2012.

¹⁴ For example, as part of a different research project, I have been following a case on obstruction of operations and defamation of character of members of the Tokushima Teachers’ Union by neonationalist citizens’ groups, Team Kansai and Zaitokukai (Citizens Refusing to Tolerate Special Rights for Koreans in Japan.) In this case, the victims, belonging to the Tokushima Teachers’ Union, filed a criminal complaint first. When some of the accused were not indicted, they filed a demand to the Committee for the Inquest of Prosecution to reexamine the case. They waited for the outcome of the committee’s conclusion, recently released on June 21, 2012, to decide on whether and when to file a civil suit. The victims have said that the civil case may require additional organizing and support and therefore, they wish to proceed with the criminal case first.

¹⁵ See [here](#) for more information on the shareholders’ lawsuit against Tepco executives.

¹⁶ See this [link](#).

¹⁷ Takahashi Tetsuya, a philosopher at the University of Tokyo, discussed the People’s Tribunal in detail at his speech on March 10, 2012, at the University of Chicago Symposium, “What 3.11 Means to Me.”

¹⁸ See Hirose, Yasuda and Akashi (2011).

¹⁹ See Nishioka (2011) on the power structures behind the 3.11 nuclear disaster; see also

Kingston 2012 for the structure of the “nuclear village.”

²⁰ See this [link](#).

²¹ See Yamashita’s position on nodules and cysts found in Fukushima children (and comparison to Nagasaki) and Helen Caldicott’s rebuttal [here](#).

²² Tepco tries to escape responsibility for the accident by stating that the cause of the accident was the “unexpectedly high tsunami waves” and blaming the Cabinet for its confusing-causing intervention. (*Mainichi Shimbun* June 20, 2012; *Asahi Shimbun* June 20, 2012) See also Kingston (2012) on Tepco’s risk assessments and the perspective of Madarame Haruki, head of the Nuclear Safety Commission.

²³ Writer Amamiya Karin also pointed out the serious community divisions in Fukushima during her talk at the University of Chicago on March 11, 2012.

²⁴ On the issue of “rumor damage” (fuhyo higai) related to food, see Aiko Kojima’s [blog entry](#).

²⁵ The Ministry of Education and Science issued a notice in April 2011 to the Fukushima Prefectural Board of Education and other relevant institutions that the temporary permissible radiation level for the use of school grounds and buildings would be 20mSv/year, far higher than the standard 1mSv/year for the general public. ([Ministry of Education and Science](#)) In addition, *Tokyo Shimbun* reported on April 18, 2012, that documents it had secured through a freedom-of-information request revealed that in April 2011, the Ministry of Education and Science, which had originally set the limit for use of school grounds at 3μSv/hour (approximately 26.3 mSv/year), had secretly raised it to 3.8μSv/hour (or 33.8mSv/year), thus reducing the number of schools whose grounds would be off-limits to one-third of what the somewhat more stringent

standard would have required. (*Tokyo Shimbun*, April 18, 2012). The annual permissible level of radiation exposure for workers at the Fukushima Dai’ichi Nuclear Power Plant was raised from 100mSv/year for emergency situations to 250mSv/year. Even for non-emergency situations, the limit was raised from 50mSv/year to 250mSv/year. In November 2011, the government issued an order reinstating the 50mSv/year or 100mSv/year limit depending on the nature of the work involved. (Press release by the [Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare](#) as of December 16, 2011.) The government raised the annual permissible radiation level for food to 5mSv in March 2011 and brought it back to the original 1mSv in April 2012.

²⁶ Potassium iodide (KI) pills can help prevent thyroid cancer, which is one of the most commonly recognized health risks of a nuclear disaster. According to the NY State Department of Health, “Taking KI saturates the thyroid gland with stable (non-radioactive) iodine. This prevents or reduces the amount of radioiodine that can be taken up by the thyroid. To be most effective, KI should be taken before or shortly after exposure to radioiodine.” ([link](#)) The Japanese government issued a report in September 2011 acknowledging that it had failed to hand out the pills immediately after the accident. Government disaster manuals require local municipalities to wait for the central government to issue an order before distributing the pills, but the central government did not order distribution until five days after the outbreak of the disaster. By the time the pills were distributed, many people in the severely affected areas had already evacuated and therefore missed the chance to receive them. Many affected people were also unaware of the pills. (*The Wall Street Journal*, September 29, 2011.)

²⁷ *Mainichi Shimbun* reported that 51 public primary schools in Fukushima city, located approximately 62 kilometers north of the

Fukushima Dai'ichi Plant, held outdoor sports meets in May 2012 (The *Mainichi Shimbun*, May 12, 2012.)

²⁸ I borrow this term to translate *hoyo* from the websites of organizations sponsoring programs for children affected by Chernobyl, such as [this](#).

Hoyo appears more and more frequently to describe time spent away from sites with high-exposure levels to promote psychological and physical recovery.

²⁹ Koriyama City of Fukushima Prefecture is reported to have lifted the regulation limiting outdoor activities as of April 2012 as a result of "decontamination" activities (i.e. removal of some soil) from school grounds. (*Fukushima Minpo*, March 25, 2012. The city is also considering reopening outdoor school swimming pools.)

³⁰ Muto's reference indicates that the "safety campaign" is now extending beyond government-sponsored public lectures and seminars on nuclear energy and radiation to small gatherings, including those simply dedicated to cancer prevention.

³¹ The media have reported some instances of falsification of the origin of school lunch ingredients. For example, the *Nikkan SPA!* website reports that when a Yokohama municipal assemblywoman investigated the source of beef used in the city's school lunch program, she found that beef from Fukushima had been included in school lunches although the labeling failed to provide clear information. (*Nikkan Spa!*, August 20, 2011) *Josei Jishin* magazine recently reported that a rice dealer in

Nagano was investigated by the police for selling rice grown in Fukushima mixed in with rice from Aomori as rice grown in Nagano. The report also explains that rice grown in Fukushima can legally be labeled "Product of Japan" for school lunch purposes. (*Josei Jishin*, June 4)

³² The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries issued a notice on April 20, 2012 to 270 food industry organizations, including restaurants and supermarkets, to follow the safety standards decided by the government and to discontinue their own examination of radiation levels in food according to their own stricter standards. See *Asahi Shimbun*, April 21, 2012, Also see the [notice](#) by the Ministry.

³³ As stated in the Introduction, the group gathered a total of 1,324 people as of June 3, the closing date of the first round of application.

³⁴ In her book, Muto goes on to give concrete examples of the global exploitation entailed by nuclear energy, discriminatory in targeting vulnerable populations. She states that nuclear power is always accompanied by the exposure of workers to radiation, from the mining of uranium to disposal of various kinds of waste. She points out that uranium mining has exposed Native Americans in the U.S. with serious consequences, and depleted uranium, a by-product of uranium enrichment, has seriously harmed the health of children in Iraq and Afghanistan. Nuclear power plant workers are also exposed to radiation during daily operations and at inspection time, and once an accident happens, ordinary citizens are exposed to massive radiation, as in Chernobyl and Fukushima. (Muto 2012:47-48)