

Report on Fukushima trip

On March 11, 2011 an earthquake measuring a magnitude of 9.0 occurred off the coast of Honshu. The earthquake produced a tsunami that affected mostly Sendai and took the lives of thousands of people and more in injuries. Fukushima Daiichi is declared a nuclear disaster when the meltdown of the reactors in the nuclear power station left contamination in the water, land and air. In the aftermath of the tsunami of March 11, 2011, the people of Japan have not only the challenge of redevelopment but the safety from Fukushima and strength to build a healthy psychological future. When I heard the news that a hydrogen explosion occurred at the Fukushima No1, No3 nuclear power stations, I instinctively knew that no one would be able to live his life as they used to in Fukushima anymore.

When Fukushima Daiichi was designed and built with information on tsunami hazard, there were no known large tsunamis that hit a particular part of the coast. Once the news of the nuclear disaster was being announced it brought a series of new tragedies to the community. They were evacuated from the surrounding area of the nuclear plant because of the release of radioactive materials. Many are not able to come back to their homes due to decaying contaminates emitting radiation. Although evacuations were set forth immediately, those that have been exposed will suffer a great deal of health problems. Cancer and tumors are likely for those who were exposed to high level of radiation. Other problems facing many is the psychological repercussions leading to stress related symptoms such as depression, anxiety, post traumatic stress disorder and medically unexplained physical symptoms. Of course, there are services provided to those who want or need them provided through the Red Cross and Association for Aid and Relief.

When we were talked with local suffered people, I was so surprised that many dairy farmers, who resisted the order because they could not forsake their cattle. I had made up my mind to keep photographing when showed us photographs. Since the area was deemed uninhabitable, there were no newspaper or mail deliveries. People were isolated from the information such as how much radiation was in the air. I have to also admit that in the early stage of this issues, I was not very aware of how dangerous the exposure to radiation could be to your body potentially. After back from Fukushima trip through the internet and from the foreign media, I slowly came to realize to my horror that people in Namie machi were living under one of the highest radiation hotspots in the world, as high as 20uSv/h. Starting in April dairy farmers began to leave slowly and by mid June, the evacuation was complete and finally I came upon the image which had taken hold of me since March. One and half year after , it is believed that the radiation dose in Fukushima is getting lower but the cesium discovered from the field in namie machi is still considered high and dangerous. Even if decontamination is improving the situation a little, if dairy farmers are not able to come back to their homes and raise their cattle, can it be said the “things are back to normal” like

politicians always mentioning. Even after the Fukushima trip, photograph, talk with local people and farmers I had recognized many things. I still keep coming back here during the Golden week to help local apple producers. The evacuated areas have no human lives but I can still feel their presence.