

Audio: Press Conference K's Statement
TRT: 0:29:40

Speakers:

Julian S. R. Victoria

Junichiro Koizumi (by translator, Brian Victoria)

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Julian Victoria

Thank you for waiting. We will now begin the press conference with former Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi. I will now read a message from Prime Minister Koizumi to the sailors. I am aware that you were members of the crew of the USS Ronald Reagan and other ships at the time of the great Japan earthquake that struck Japan in March of 2011. As an ally of Japan, your ships were quickly dispatched in the Tohoku region as part of Operation Tomodachi where you all did your utmost to aid the Japanese victims of this unprecedented catastrophe. I would like to once again express my deepest appreciation and gratitude for your efforts.

However, I am also aware that in the midst of your rescue activities you unfortunately encountered a series of explosions that took place at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, resulting in your exposure to radiation. As a result, you experienced severe damage to your health with many of you currently suffering from a variety of serious illnesses. I am deeply pained to learn of this truly tragic situation and express my heartfelt sympathy to each one of you. I pray from the bottom of my heart for your complete recovery just as quickly as possible. Sincerely, Junichiro Koizumi.

Mr. Koizumi [translator] Last month I heard about the situation of the soldiers who are here in the United States who participated in Operation Tomodachi who were experiencing various medical problems from Brian Victoria—who happens to be myself—and Amy Fujimoto. And I had been aware, of course, of Operation Tomodachi, that many American sailors had done their utmost or service personnel had done their utmost to help the Japanese people in their time of need as a result of the earthquake and tsunami. But I was really surprised to learn how many service people had been affected by their exposure to radiation and how seriously their health had deteriorated. And I learned about that by coming here today.

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And I cannot help but asking or thinking what a strange situation it is that the soldiers or these service personnel are in the situation they find themselves in, many of them are in deep pain with many medical problems, and yet the Japanese people have not been told about this situation. And I heard from Brian that if I would go to the United States and would meet these soldiers, that that could provide the catalyst for both the people of Japan and the United States to become better aware of their situation.

Having now come and met with the soldiers and having learned of their true situation, I realize that this is something that just can't be skipped over and can't be ignored any longer.

And so I arrived here on the 15th, and for the last three days I have met a total of 10 sailors who were involved in Operation Tomodachi, and I heard about their medical conditions. And I really feel it's made a deep impression on me to actually directly hear from the sailors themselves about their medical conditions and the pain and the suffering that they are experiencing at the present time. I am one of those who when I was the prime minister of Japan I promoted nuclear power. However, as a result of the Fukushima disaster, I have changed from a proponent to an opponent, and I am now demanding that Japan reduce its reliance on nuclear power to zero.

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At the time I was prime minister of Japan I had no specialized or professional knowledge about nuclear power. I simply relied on the advice of experts, and those experts were telling me that nuclear power, first of all, is safe, that it's cheap and that it's clean. And at the time I simply believed what they told me. After I finished my service as prime minister and then, of course, Fukushima happened, and after Fukushima I began reading about nuclear power, the history of nuclear power, and I came to the conclusion, after extensive reading about this question, that those three claims of it being safe, cheap and clean were all lies.

Since coming here and by meeting these 10 soldiers, I now understand how they came to be irradiated, and I understand the suffering that they are going through at this moment. When I first heard about this situation in Japan in April, there were only 200 sailors who were part of the lawsuit that's been brought. Now when we were preparing to come it was 300. And now that I've come and arrived here I now understand there are over 400 sailors who are part of this lawsuit. So I'm aware that the Reagan was on its way to South Korea at the time of the tsunami and earthquake and that it was redirected from its purpose to South Korea, it was redirected to come and aid the victims of the earthquake and the tsunami.

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And now I realize that after they were redirected to the Tohoku region of Japan to the Fukushima area, that they brought much needed supplies by helicopter, especially from the USS Reagan but other ships as well, they brought those supplies to the people in need in that area, but as a result they themselves became contaminated, became sick. And I simply don't understand why the people of the U.S. and Japan have not been made aware of this situation, even though five years has elapsed. And I am certain that the majority of the Japanese people have a great deal of respect and gratitude for the aid that those sailors brought to us at the time of the disaster.

And I am certain that if the Japanese people, even though they may not be specialists in radiation sickness or sicknesses, that if they heard about this situation, that even though they weren't specialists they would know that this number of healthy young people getting seriously sick, that any normal person, logical person would recognize that it has to be from the radiation. And so we now understand that there were serious meltdowns and that those meltdowns did release massive amounts of radiation and that TEPCO was responsible for that. And of course I'm aware now that those sailors who were affected have started a lawsuit saying that what TEPCO did and the way it acted was irresponsible. I hear that TEPCO's position is that there's no connection between the sicknesses these sailors are experiencing and the meltdowns at Fukushima.

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I hear that even in America, American doctors that these sailors have seen refuse to admit that these sailors' diseases have any connection to their exposure to radiation, or they say that it is possible, but they refuse to confirm the fact. Especially for someone like me who long believed that nuclear energy was safe, cheap and clean, it's come as a shock and it seems very clear to me that there's a relationship between the medical conditions of these sailors and their exposure to radiation. It's now become clear that Tokyo Electric Power Company or TEPCO purposely hid the truth of what was happening, especially about the meltdowns, from the public as a whole.

Here I can't help but saying that having listened to the testimonies of these 10 sailors, that it also seems like the United States Navy is also part of the cover-up. So I can't help but thinking that the media in both Japan and the United States are hiding the truth of what's happening to the sailors. So I don't want to focus on the situation in the United States or with the media here, but I certainly do think that it's important for the media in Japan to tell the truth about what's going on.

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And I think personally that this is something that is so serious that I can't just think, oh, well, it's too bad what happened to them, and, well, you know, that's just the way things are. I now feel I have to do something about it myself. So I really feel that I have to do something to help both the Japanese people and the American people understand the importance of this issue. I have always had a great deal of respect and gratitude for what the sailors did on behalf of the Japanese people who were suffering as a result of the earthquake and tsunami and meltdowns, but now I realize, in addition to that respect and gratitude, I realize that I myself must do something to aid and support these sailors.

So when I return to Japan I'm going to get people who are sympathetic, who are understanding of this situation. We're going to get together and we're going to discuss concretely what can we do to show not simply our respect and gratitude, but to offer our support to these sailors? I would like to think this is something, this effort

would be joined by both those people who are opposed to nuclear power as well as those people who are still proponents of nuclear power, that it's not a question of being for or against nuclear power, it's a question of doing something on behalf of the sailors who are now suffering as a result of their participation in Operation Tomodachi.

I'd like to thank all of you in the press for having come today, because I know that you have an important role to play in sharing this situation, in making both the American and Japanese people aware of this situation, and that will hopefully help them to more fully address and support these sailors and what's happening to them. I'd be glad to entertain your questions at this point.

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