**IMUN 2023 Research Report**

**Security Council Issue #2: The question of Japan’s treatment of nuclear waste**

The question of Japan’s treatment of nuclear waste is an important and relevant issue and is with reference to the country’s recent actions to discharge the stored nuclear waste from the Fukushima power plant starting in August 2023 (BBC). The action has divided experts and scientists and has garnered both support and dissent from many countries. China, South Korea, Russia, and many Japanese citizens have expressed concerns about the discharging of the contaminated water or have called for more transparency from Japan on their actions (NYT). It is with the idea of international peace and diplomacy in mind that this issue will be debated in the Security Council.

**The Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Accident**

In March 2011, Japan experienced one of the most damaging successive natural disasters in recent times. A 9.1 magnitude earthquake followed by two tsunamis, the second of which was 40 meters (~131 ft), occurred on the 11th of March. The second tsunami cleared a tsunami wall that protected the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, and in turn compromised the cooling systems used in its 3 working reactor cores. These nuclear reactors subsequently had meltdowns which were combated with the use of ocean water, therefore contaminating this water. After the emergency was declared over, the aftermath included ruined nuclear fuel rods, the release of radioactive steam, and the aforementioned contamination of ocean water with the radioactive cores (Britannica). The exclusion zone around the accident site reaches 30 km. The radioactive fallout is expansive with much of the forests that cover 75% of the contamination zone have not been cleaned yet (Chemistry World).

**Dischargement of Nuclear Waste**

Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) has been routinely treating “some 350 million gallons [of waste that is] ...being stored in more than 1,000 tanks on-site…” (NPR). The contaminated water is treated through the Advanced Liquid Processing System or ALPS (New Scientist). The plan for the decontamination was created in 2019 as the facility holding the waste was nearing its capacity, which has now been reached (CNN). Japanese officials also plan to decommission the entire power plant, and this can only be done if the contaminated water is discharged (Reuters). This treated water still contains “tritium and carbon-14 [which] are, respectively, radioactive forms of hydrogen and carbon, and are difficult to separate from water” (BBC). Although these elements are found in nature and emit very low radiation levels, they can pose a health risk if a large quantity is consumed. Additionally, as the long-term effects of the treated waste have not been studied there is much fear about the release’s impact on the environment and humans (Reuters). On the other hand, “Japan's government says the final level of tritium - about 1,500 becquerels per litre - is much safer than the level required by regulators for nuclear waste discharge, or by the World Health Organization for drinking water” (BBC). Four nuclear waste releases in the ocean have been scheduled, with the entire process slated to end in the next 20 to 30 years (TEPCO).

**UN Perspective**

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), an UN-affiliated agency, has given their approval of Japan’s release plans, stating that they are “consistent with IAEA Safety Standards”. They have also stated that “the discharges of the treated water would have a negligible radiological impact to people and the environment” (IAEA). Conversely, three independent UN human rights activists have expressed their concerns and disappointment of the water discharges, under the argument of the water's impact on millions in Pacific nations (UN).

**Reactions From Other Countries**

Multiple UN nations have expressed their concerns of the discharged water, with some taking action by banning Japanese seafood products from certain regions from being traded and sold in their countries. Public anxiety in South Korea, China, and much of Japan, has mounted as people voice their discontentment of the nuclear waste release to their respective governments (BBC). The Pacific Islands Forum, which includes the Marshall Islands and Tahiti have also voiced concerns of the efforts, as many of these countries are still recovering from “high levels of radioactive fallout as a result of atmospheric nuclear tests during the Cold War” (NPR). Even if the dumping efforts do not have health impacts, the public perception of the actions has economically affected fishers and those in the seafood industry in certain Japanese regions. The concerns are especially prominent among the Fukushima fishing industry, which has already been reduced due to the disaster (CNN). The United States and many other countries have voiced their support of the waste discharging, but the event is shedding light on how other nuclear power plants around the world discharge their own contaminated waste. It also brings up the debate of imposing another environmental concern onto a planet that is already experiencing high levels of climate change.

Debate should be focused on protecting the fishers and farmers who have been affected by negative press about the waste release and preventing environmental damage potentially caused by the release. It should also address the discontented countries who hold stock in the goings on in the Pacific Ocean and the countries that have placed bans on Japanese seafood and give solutions on how to maintain international peace amongst the involved countries.

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