



Interview with Junko Akuta of the Fukushima International Association

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Question 1: Introduction

My name is Junko Akuta. I work at the Fukushima International Association. My hometown is Iwaki city, Fukushima. It is about 100 km south of Fukushima city.

Question 2: Have there been any changes to your daily life since the earthquake?

There are two things that changed since the earthquake. One is our preparations for earthquakes. Before, when an earthquake came we would do simple things, like hold a chest of drawers closed. This time there was a long period when there was no water and we were suffering. Now we have 30 liter tanks in our front yards always filled with water. One more change is the radiation. The nuclear situation at the reactor in Fukushima is still ongoing, and there is still radiation in the air. We are living constantly aware of this radiation. For example, before we took hanging laundry outside for granted, but now we wonder if it is OK to do so. Likewise, drying a futon outside also makes us think twice. Also, while tending to the garden and cutting the grass we think about the radiation. It feels like we are always conscious of the radiation.

Question 3: Has it affected your work?

My work is at the international association, so the majority of my work during the disaster was to convey information about the earthquake through foreign languages to non-Japanese residents living in Fukushima. My work up until the disaster was always providing information for daily life, but especially during the disaster, it was difficult for foreigners to get information about radiation and such matters because most of the information was provided only in Japanese. So I put this information up on the homepage.

Question 4: Did foreigners and Japanese react differently to the threat of radiation?

With regards to the radiation, both Japanese and non-Japanese were equally worried.

Question 5: What is the current situation in Fukushima city?

On the surface, daily life in Fukushima has returned to normal. Everyone is trying to return to a normal life so the current conditions have really come back to normal.

Question 6: Are you encouraging foreigners to return to Fukushima?

It is a fact that many foreigners have changed their minds about coming to Fukushima. But for us living in Fukushima, we don't want them to make their decision based on an overreaction. Now the level of radiation in Fukushima is being announced publicly. It is a safe area so it is fine to come here, but you must decide for yourself. We



are using the Internet to publish information on the current situation and radiation levels in Fukushima. We want people to look at it and then make an informed decision.

Question 7: Is there anything you would like to say about the current conditions?

I was very surprised to be in the position of a victim and be the one receiving support. Also, we write "Fukushima" in kanji, but now it is written in katakana. Among Japanese cities, those written in Katakana are: Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Okinawa. Now Fukushima is included in that group. That means that on a global scale it has become a disaster city. The change from kanji to katakana was a big shock, but that is the truth of the matter. However, I don't want Fukushima to be represented as a disaster city. Rather, I want it to become a model for a new region and new social system. I want everyone to see it with that same hope too.

Question 8: Is there anything you would like to tell teachers and students around the world?

If you are overseas, I think information about Fukushima is limited. If possible, I would like you to come to Fukushima to see the actual conditions with your own eyes and draw your own conclusions.

Interviewed by Robert Fish, Director of Education and Family Programs, Japan Society of New York. For About Japan: A Teacher's Resource <<http://aboutjapan.japansociety.org>>